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VILLAGE SERMONS

VILLAGE SERMONS

BY THE LATE

F. J. A. HORT

D.D., D.C.L., LL.D.

SOMETIME HULSEAN PROFESSOR
AND LADY MARGARET'S READER IN DIVINITY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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PREFATORY NOTE.

One cannot without some misgiving add to the volumes of sermons already in existence. Yet, simple and unpretentious as these discourses are in form, a deep and wide theology underlies them, which, with the calm and trustful spirit that they reveal, will, it may be hoped, make them a source of strength to many readers.

They were all preached to a village congregation in the churches of St. Ippolyts and Great Wymondley, in Hertfordshire, of which double parish my father was vicar from 1857 to 1872. Each sermon represents many hours of anxious thought; for the preacher gave to his simple parishioners, as afterwards to University students, nothing but his best. The first of the series was preached on his first Sunday in his new parish: of the next eleven, several were delivered more than once, some of them in later years

at Cambridge with considerable alterations: in such cases the original or 'village' form has been retained. The last twelve sermons form a continuous series, delivered once only, in 1868. I have ventured to correct a few obvious slips, since, in spite of frequent careful revision, the manuscript was clearly only meant for the author's own use.

ARTHUR FENTON HORT.

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[The dates are those of the first time of preaching.]

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VILLAGE SERMONS

I

THE ANOINTING OF THE SPIRIT TO PREACH FREEDOM AND LIGHT

"THE Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor ; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."—*Luke* iv. 18, 19.

THESE words belong to the Old Testament as well as the New. They were spoken first by the prophet Isaiah, and from him our Lord Jesus Christ took them, making them henceforth His own. But they do not come to an end with Him. If the preachers of the Jewish nation might lawfully speak thus, much more the preachers of the Christian Church. In the same spirit, and in the same power, must every one go forth whom God has commanded to declare His name unto men.

And therefore, dear brethren, I have not feared to set this text before you on this the first day of my speaking to you from this place. If it is presumptuous and wrong to claim so high a mission,

I had better hold my peace now and for ever. To put forth any lower claim, to ask you to listen to any other kind of message, would rob me of all hope, all strength, all freedom of utterance, and would keep you, as far as human acts can do, from knowing the Lord your Saviour.

Let us turn for a little while to Isaiah and his prophecy. Looking forward to the captivity which was coming upon the Jews for their manifold sins against God, he looked yet further across all their miseries to the deliverance which should be given to them at last. Their forlorn state as prisoners in a foreign land seemed to pass before his eyes : he saw them downcast, helpless, enslaved, shut up in dark dungeons. All these sights were dreadful to one who loved his people so warmly and could not bear to think of their sufferings ; and yet he knew in his inmost heart that all these things *must* come upon them, so deeply were they sunk in sin : dreadful as God's judgments on their sins might be, their sins themselves were much more dreadful and more hopeless still : it was dreadful that foreign armies should tear them away from their homes and the city where their fathers and grandfathers had lived ; but far more dreadful that they should tear *themselves* away from the presence of their gracious and loving God, and prefer their own devices and lusts to His will. But God did not suffer Isaiah to be overwhelmed with that dark vision of sin and the punishment of sin. He taught him that those sharp judgments were sent in mercy to root out the sins which made them needful, and that

at last they would do their appointed work, and the people would repent. In the words which go before the text in Isaiah's prophecy (lx. 21), this is the Lord's promise, "Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified." From that root of righteousness should spring the fruit of glory and happiness. "A little one," the prophecy goes on, "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the Lord will hasten it in its time."

Such was the lesson which Isaiah had to learn and learn over again, before he could truly know in himself, or truly make known to others, the work which God had appointed for him as a preacher to the people around him. It was needful that he should, on the one hand, feel most keenly all the evils dwelling within him and his brethren, and pressing upon him and his brethren, and, on the other hand, that he should know how far God's love and mercy go beyond man's sin and misery. So long as he had any doubt or misgiving about God's character, all his own words could not fail to be perverse or even altogether false. But, now that he had learned that God was indeed Israel's Redeemer, who must and would at last bring them back to Himself, he could boldly go forth in the strength of that faith as God's messenger to them. And this was the message which he delivered: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings

unto the meek ; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God ; to comfort all that mourn. To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified."

Words like these could not lose their power when the man who uttered them was dead and gone. Isaiah had not said a word which could lead the Israelites to put their trust in *him*, and then to fall away when he departed from among them. His own faith was in the Everlasting King, who was always with His people, and who might suffer generation after generation to pass before He should bring the promised deliverance. Isaiah might die, and many another prophet anointed by the Lord like him, and like him filled with the Spirit of the Lord God ; but the good tidings to the meek, the liberty to the captives, could not die, for they came from the ever-flowing love of the undying God. Every new age could not but receive some fresh gift of the joy and freedom which He was for ever preparing for His people. When therefore Isaiah's words were written in a book, and handed down from father to son, they must have brought comfort and strength to many a weary soul in troubles yet worse than those which afflicted Jerusalem in the reign of

Hezekiah. The seven hundred years which passed before Christ came were full of events that must have given such words much precious meaning to all who had hearts to receive it. And so we cannot doubt it was on that memorable day of which we read in St. Luke. In that village of Nazareth, up in the Galilean hills, it is hard, in spite of what follows, to think that there were none to whom the words were not only familiar, but dear. All this must be borne in mind, if we would understand our Lord's act. The story occurs in St. Luke, immediately after the Temptation ; but, if we compare it with the shorter accounts of what is obviously the same event in St. Matthew (xiii. 54-58) and St. Mark (vi. 1-6), we shall see that our Lord must have preached and worked miracles in Capernaum and the neighbourhood of the sea of Galilee before He thus went up to His old home at Nazareth. Still, the visit to Nazareth must have occurred early in His ministry, and we are warranted in taking His language in that synagogue as one of the most marked declarations of the purpose of His whole teaching.

Let us read St. Luke's story. "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up ; and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor ; he hath sent me

to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.' And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.' And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?'"

It was, it seems, our Lord's custom in these early months after His baptism and temptation to enter the synagogues of different villages on the sabbath day and preach to the congregations with the leave of the ruler of the synagogue, as was often done in Judea at that time. By this means His fame was soon spread abroad through Galilee. At last He went to Nazareth, where he had spent His childhood and early manhood till He was thirty years old, and there too, as usual, He stood up in the synagogue to read and preach. We English Christians, who know that that Nazarene preacher was the son of God Himself, might have supposed that He would draw the whole congregation to His feet to worship Him and follow Him by proclaiming His high glory and Godhead, and working some astonishing miracle to prove His power. A time came at last when multitudes did follow Him with signs of noisy worship, and He rode from Bethany to Jerusalem over a carpet of palm leaves, with shouts of "Hosanna

to the Son of David." But what could the value of such a conversion, of such a worship be, when those same multitudes were as noisily shouting for His murder before a week had passed? No, that was not His way of proving that He came from God, or of showing what are the features of God's nature which He wishes us to regard most. He chose rather the words of the poor afflicted prophet of Hezekiah, who had lived and died in the latter days of the old Jewish kingdom just before the Captivity. The faith of the prophet was also the faith of the Son of God, the same Holy Spirit rested on both, both had the same mission to point to the Father in heaven as the true deliverer from evil. Christ as little as Isaiah made Himself the end and object of His preaching. "I am come in my Father's name," he says to the Jews, in St. John v. 43, "and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." But the words which Isaiah could pronounce only after many a bitter lesson, with fear and trembling, albeit with true faith, knowing that he could, after all, do but feebly and imperfectly the work which God had sent him to do, these words the Son of God could repeat without swerving as belonging entirely to Himself, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily: in Him, as the Bible has it, they were *fulfilled.* It seemed in some measure a humble office that He claimed, even though the Spirit of God might go along with it; and yet He was indeed therein claiming to be the promised Messiah or Christ, for the words Messiah and Christ mean 'anointed';

and thus expressly to declare Himself anointed by the Lord in an age which lacked prophets, but was always expecting the coming of the Messiah, was in effect to hint that He was Himself that Messiah.

But this teaching about Himself was still more clearly and forcibly a teaching about the Messiah. To men who were looking for a grand conquering Messiah it was good to be taught, not by some new-fangled doctrine, but by the very words of God's old prophets to Israel, that the true anointing of God is to such work as preaching the gospel to the poor.

This then is the office which Christ sets forth as His own before all others. Let us try to get at its meaning a little more closely. By 'preaching the gospel' in the present day is often meant expounding a certain set of doctrines about Christ's death and the benefits which are thereby obtained for us; and to us now Christ's death must always rightly be the deepest part of the gospel. But it was simply impossible for the Jews of Nazareth so to understand our Lord's words. He was but beginning by slow degrees to make Himself known, the chief events of His Life, above all, His Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension were still to come. There is really nothing lying on the surface of the phrase that refers to any particular doctrines. It means simply 'to tell good news,' 'to preach good tidings,' and, if you will refer again to the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, from which the quotation is taken, you will find that He is there said to be anointed "to preach good tidings." "Good tidings to the *meek*," he goes on, whereas our Lord spoke of preaching good tidings to the *poor*.

It is worth notice that there is just such a difference in the beginning of the two Gospel accounts of the Sermon on the Mount. According to St. Matthew Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven": according to St. Luke He said, "Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." The 'poor in spirit' of St. Matthew answer to the 'meek' of Isaiah. Now we must not go away with a notion that one of these meanings is right and the other wrong: rather, by comparing them boldly together, we may find more exactly the full meaning of Scripture. The Hebrew word in Isaiah means both 'poor' and also 'meek,' but—mark this—it is especially used when it is wished to speak in one word of those who are both poor and meek. By the 'poor' is not here meant simply those who are in want of money or other property, but all who are in any way depressed or beaten down low in any way, whether by what we commonly call poverty, or cruelty, or tyranny, or any other sore burden. Such are the 'poor,' and the 'poor in spirit' are they who yet more than this have been led by their distresses to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, casting all their care upon Him since He careth for them, and will exalt them in due season, if they are not over-anxious to exalt themselves. This then was Christ's first work, to bring good news to the poor and afflicted, to bring it to them whether they were poor in spirit or not, although it would profit them little if they were not. Good news to the poor was His first message to the men of Nazareth; Blessing to the poor, above all, to

the poor in spirit, the first sentence of the Sermon on the Mount; Good news to the poor the crowning sign of Himself which He gave to John the Baptist's disciples. We cannot desire three occasions more decisive than these. But what were these good news? They are partly unfolded in the words that follow: "Deliverance to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, relief to the bruised,"—these were some of the good things which were promised to men. They all refer to outward distresses and outward benefits. And why should they not? Surely God, who made man to dwell upon the earth, must care for the earthly troubles of men, must delight to relieve men from their earthly troubles: surely to tell men of *this* graciousness of their Heavenly Father must be a part of any true good news brought from heaven to earth, a part of *the* good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God. At all events, we who receive the four Gospels as the record of His acts on earth are bound to that belief. Consider for a moment what these Gospels would lose if Christ's feedings of the hungry, His healings of diseases, His raisings from the dead were cut out of it as unworthy of a spiritual religion. No, blessed be God, so long as we hold fast the Book of Life, we cannot be cheated by the cruelty and heartlessness of man's gospels since we have God's gospel to fall back upon, and we know from that that nothing is too low for His care and love, without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground. Every attempt to raise men out of a condition of depression and suffering is a carrying out of God's gospel, and part of the work which

He is ever accomplishing. It is true that all the evils of poverty are by His appointment, just as all the evils of disease which fall on all mankind alike are by his appointment; but, just as a great part of Christ's gospel work when on earth was the healing of diseases, so a great part of His work now is the removal of more partial and unequal hardships.

But, though the deliverance promised by Christ at Nazareth included deliverance from outward ills, it could not stop there; all the words that He used point still more strongly to those deeper and more inward ills, which we may overlook, it may be, for days and weeks and months, but which, in sickness or other seasons of quietness, are suddenly seen in our hearts with most unwelcome clearness. Bondage, blindness, bruises,—is there any one here who has not at some time felt that his very inmost self was subject to one or other of those evils, that he was unable to do what his conscience commanded him to do, unable to see and know what he needed to see and know, crushed and bruised by the attacks of inward enemies and the weight of his own past misdeeds? Then here too Christ is the messenger of good tidings. From these strange evils, which seem so slippery, so desperately hard to get at, so deep down beyond the reach or help of our fellowmen,—from these God is able and willing to deliver us, if we will only trust Him wholly. But His blessed purpose is hindered in two ways: first, we do but half believe that these inward evils really are there; the outward evils we cannot help seeing and feeling with our bodily senses: but it is otherwise with the

inward evils ; we can shut our eyes to them for a long while, if we choose, and persuade ourselves they are not there, while all the while they are destroying unawares the divine life within, and making us more and more fit to dwell only with beasts and devils. Secondly, we will not submit to the remedies which God provides for these diseases of our spirits. His medicines are too bitter and nauseous, and we had rather die than take them. And this explains what I said just now, that outward evils are not only relieved by God, but sent by God. As long as we endure distress, we may be sure that some sin is enslaving us, from which by this means He is striving to set us free. Yet it is still good news that He will set us free, if only we will allow Him, however distasteful to our lower nature the way may be. And do not think that He has only *told* us of that way. No, His words were but a small part of His gospel. His acts are a much mightier part. He has gone Himself that way before us. He has drained our cup of bitterness to the dregs. The full meaning of the good tidings could not be known till He had died and risen again for us. The atonement for sin made once for all by the blood of His cross is at once the pledge of our deliverance from these deadliest and inmost enemies, and the only means by which it could be effected. I shall often have occasion to speak of that great event, which both is itself the weightiest part of Christ's good tidings to men and sheds much light on the other parts. But to-day I have spoken of the gospel in the way in which our Lord's own words bring it before us, as above all

things a gospel of *freedom* and *light*. If we forget the lessons of these earlier chapters, if we describe the gospel in such a way as to make it seem that in Christ's own discourses and parables He was preaching no gospel at all, then we shall indeed be turning God's truth into a lie, and the very message of His love will become a curse to mankind instead of a blessing.

The good tidings which Christ preached Himself, He commanded His Apostles to preach also: we are told that they did so during His lifetime and after His death, and we have in their speeches and letters trustworthy samples of the manner in which they preached the good tidings, applying them with wonderful variety and boldness to the several changes which befel their flocks in different places and times, but always mindful to keep the good tidings truly good, true freedom to captives, true light to blinded eyes. And from them the command has passed on to generation after generation for eighteen centuries; and the work of Christ's ministers is still the same, to proclaim those same glad tidings, always bearing in mind to whom they are addressed. But may they go further than this? May they take to themselves the earlier words of my text, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me, because He hath sent me"? Yes, brethren, with all my heart I believe they may. Can anything be imagined more hopeless than to strive to speak the words of the Lord, and yet not to have been sent by the Lord, nor filled with the Spirit of the Lord? But they who, according to the due

order of His Church, have been set apart for this very work, and bidden to receive the Holy Ghost in the name of the Blessed Trinity, may surely believe that He will truly be with them. They may grieve Him and be deaf to His truest inspirations yet more than any whose work less specially consists in setting forth the Gospel; but He will still be there, and woe be to them if they preach in their own name or in their own strength.

Weaker words than these of Christ would give but little hope or courage. And yet what a lesson is read to both you and me, dear brethren, by the close of St. Luke's story! The gospel preached by Christ Himself to the men of His own village was of no avail. "All they in the synagogue, when they heard" Him speak of God's mercies to heathens, "were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong." "He came to his own," says St. John, "and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God." Yes! that name of Christ He bestows on all. We too are all His own. Let us all, brethren, strive together to help one another to receive the only begotten Son of God. The same Holy Ghost is given to us all, the same Christ is ever interceding for us all. We may do much to help or hinder the work each of the other. But, blessed be God, no human hindrance can at last mar His work, except by His will, which He is carrying on in every heart and in our whole community, with or without human

aid. When we are fully persuaded that our weaknesses can be no clog to His strength, and that His purposes are altogether gracious, we shall indeed feel more keenly the dreadfulness of not suffering those purposes to prevail within ourselves, but we shall have a better hope for our neighbours and our country. To keep such a persuasion always strong is no easy task: and it may well be, brethren, that you will hear from me at times faithless words, untrue to God and the gospel of His grace. In such a case, all that I have been endeavouring to say to-day will bear witness against me before you and before God. That God's mind towards man is from first to last love altogether without any reserve, and that His various dealings with man, whether of mercy or of judgment, are but the wise and orderly workings of His love, this is the gospel which we have received from Christ and His Church. And how can we forget the awful curse which St. Paul pronounced upon himself and his brother apostles, if we or an angel from heaven should preach any other?

II

PRAYER FOR MERCY AND BLESSING

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and show us the light of his countenance."—*Psalm* lxvii. 1.

This psalm we read now and then in the evening service. To-day it comes before us in the ordinary course of the evening psalms. Thus sometimes it is joined with the two gospel hymns of the New Testament which stand first for the evening service in our prayer book after the first and second lessons respectively: sometimes it takes its place among the ancient national songs of the Jewish people. Both these ways of using it are worth our notice, as they show us various ways of studying its words, and so of gathering more and more of its meaning. At whatever time in the history of the Jews, and by whatever psalmist it may have been written, it is probably intended as a lengthening out and filling up of the form of blessing which God committed to Moses in the wilderness, as we read in Numbers vi. 22: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this

wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, 'The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.' And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them." The first germ, therefore, of the psalm comes down to us from a very early time indeed; and yet there is perhaps none which, if we listen to it attentively, rings out with so fresh a sound, as if it were written expressly for ourselves in this very day. It is easy to repeat it hastily as a general prayer for blessing, and so to think that it has nothing particular to tell us, nothing which we have not heard all our lives, nothing which we do not know so well as to be sick of what we feel to be the unchanging sameness. Alas! it is not our knowledge of this psalm, or of all the psalms, that is in fault first of all. It is our way of thinking that we have got to the bottom of anything, because we know so well the words in which it is spoken of, and have a certain loose notion of what they mean or are said to mean. This is the prevailing disease of all our minds: not one of us is free from it. It spoils and injures us in every possible way: it makes all our life dull and insipid, and, what is far worse, it makes all our life unkindly and unfruitful. The desire of novelty and change, of escaping now and then from the same thoughts and sights is not in itself wrong. God Himself has planted it in us. It is we ourselves who give the right desire a wrong twist, and turn it into an instrument of our own discomfort and injury,

by neglecting the way in which God would have us gratify it. Our weariness of our old thoughts and sights comes from our fancying that we have known and seen already all that is to be seen and known in them. And so we either resign ourselves to hopeless emptiness and thoughtlessness, or else rush off to some other field which promises us a store of new things, but of which we soon weary in like manner, because we are so ready to imagine that it contains no more food for our minds. Oh, if we would only believe that we really know but a very little of the things which our minds and our senses are daily handling, that in all the years of a long life we can but take a little sip from the depths of wonder and glory which are always close to every one of us. When we once have begun to learn something of that belief, we can take up old things once more with a new interest, and find out by degrees that everything which our eyes behold, or our minds think about, or our hearts feel, is in truth so rich in matter for our thoughts that we need never complain of dulness. Or if, after all, we feel that the dulness is there and cannot be denied, we may be sure that the fault lies not in the things themselves, scarcely even in any mere ignorance or weakness of ours, but rather in the coldness and hardness of our hearts; in short, in evils within us which need the help of no human learning or other kind of human power, but only the influence of God's Holy Spirit, and our own efforts that the Holy Spirit's work within us may not come to nothing.

I have been a long time in coming to the 67th

Psalm; but it will not have been lost time, if it makes you more disposed to believe that it is not an easy matter to get really to the bottom of a psalm, and that, though we may know the words by heart, and a trifle of their meaning also, there may be abundance of meaning remaining for us yet to discover. I do not mean that what I have been saying applies only to what we are accustomed to call religious subjects: it applies to all possible kinds of subjects. Only to-day I want you to apply it especially to this psalm, and the vague meaning which, I said, we are so much accustomed to put upon it, that is, as being a general prayer for blessing. Surely, supposing the meaning of the psalm to be truly conveyed by these words, are we so very sure that we know quite well what *they* mean? Is prayer such a very easy and obvious thing, and is it so very hard to fall into a wrong manner of praying, that we can afford to do without any help that God gives us as to the true meaning and purpose of prayer? It is at least strange that the Bible should say so much about the manner of praying, and above all that Christ should have taught His disciples what we call the Lord's prayer, using these remarkable words, "After this manner pray ye," if every one could certainly find out for himself how to pray aright. And again, that other word 'blessing' we must not hastily suppose that we fully understand; for, when we shall know fully what true blessing is, and when we can with all our hearts pray God to bless us according to the fulness of that knowledge, we shall have little more to learn in the Christian

life. Perhaps from this psalm, or even a verse of it, we may learn to know better than we have known before, what a prayer for blessings should be.

The psalm from first to last is one strain of faith and trust in God, rising in the middle into a burst of proud exultation in Him. But it begins more humbly and quietly, and, as it were, feels its way up to a higher and louder pitch. Its first prayer is a prayer for mercy. There are no tormenting doubts and fears lest God should not really be merciful in Himself, or show mercy to him who utters the prayer. But there is a feeling of needing mercy, a feeling that, when God shows us kindness and favour, it is more than we should have a right to expect if our deserts were to be strictly weighed, that there is much in us which does not invite and call for kindness and favour, but rather repels it; that God knows all this evil which defiles us, and yet passes it over, and thinks only of His own lovingkindness and that we are still His children. A prayer therefore which begins with asking for God's mercy is a prayer which begins with confession. It casts aside all notion of rights on our part. It throws us on our knees before the throne of the Heavenly King, and bids Him look upon us not according to our nature, but according to His; not as men deserve to be looked upon, who have sinned and rebelled against their rightful Lord, but as it becomes a God of love and grace to look. It asks him to listen with that look and in that mind to all the petitions that follow, and to grant them freely for His own great Name's sake.

"God be merciful to us and bless us." What is the blessing here prayed for? Does it mean, 'God send us good things'? I cannot think so. A prayer for good things may be a quite right and lawful one, and yet the whole teaching of the Bible tends to show that, if our minds are filled chiefly with that thought, we cannot pray in the manner in which Christ taught His disciples. Nor does that meaning of the word suit well its place in the verse, considering the force of the words which go before and of those which follow. It is true we often call things blessings, only because they are pleasant or useful to us. But this arises either from a careless way of using words vaguely without considering what we mean by them, or, worse still, from a fondness for cant and a mere pretence of godliness. Whenever we speak of blessings thoughtfully and deliberately, we mean to point to them not merely as they concern us, but as they concern God and us together; we mean that they are marks of *God's* favour and approval *to us*. When we receive a present from any friend or relation whom we love and whom we know to love us, we value it not only for its own sake and the use of which it may be to us, but still more for the sake of the giver, as a keepsake and mark of his love. Just so is it in our dealings with God and His gifts to us. When we speak of them as blessings, we mean to say that we value them chiefly as keepsakes, as it were, from Him, as tokens that He does really love us and has pleasure in bestowing gifts upon us. A prayer for blessing is therefore not so much a prayer for gifts as a prayer for that favour

and friendliness in God's mind towards us, which we value most in His gifts to us or in any other gifts.

This is a part of the meaning of the word 'bless,' but it is not the whole. If you look at some of the passages in the earlier books of the Bible where the word occurs, you will see that it is generally used respecting words pronounced by God, rather than actual gifts sent by Him. Thus, in Gen. i. 21, 22, we read, "And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.'"

You will see the force of this meaning better by remembering the opposite word 'curse.' When we speak of a curse, we think more of the actual uttering of the words of the curse, and of the fierce and destroying mind of which they are the utterance, than of any actual evil results produced. We should shun one whom we believed to be under a curse, even though he should be as prosperous as any of his neighbours. Just so it is with a blessing. When we give a friend joy, as we call it, we believe and know that, if he cares for us, our words themselves are a real joy to him; they bring us more closely into each other's presence, so that we can more entirely rejoice together; and the pith and substance of our friend's delight consists in this, that something of our warmth and friendliness towards him seems to go out of us to him in the very words.

It is the same when God blesses us. We cannot hear Him speaking to us with our outward ears, as we can hear our human friends speaking to us. But yet He does speak to us and give us joy in all the gifts which He sends us. They too, like the words of a friend, seem to come out of Him and to be a part of Him, and to bring us near to the tenderness and love which He feels for us, and which He wishes us to see and rejoice. And thus the heartiest greeting that we can give to a friend is "God bless you!" We do not merely wish that God will shower upon him all good things, though this may be included in the wish; but we pray that God's own heart may be open to him in love and favour. We bless him ourselves, tell him of *our* love, but more than this we pray that God will greet him as we are greeting him, nay, a thousand times more; that all that which we now feel for him may be felt for him by God, only with all the infinite strength and depth of God's nature. We bless him all we can, but we feel that our heart is too feeble for our wishes, and we pray God to make up our shortcomings and bless him as only God can bless. The psalmist has therefore gone a step beyond his first prayer. He prays that God will not only overlook our sinful state but greet us as His friends, and send forth words and acts which may express His welcome and approval.

In the next clause he goes still further. "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and show us the light of his countenance," or, as the Bible translation expresses it, "cause his face to shine upon us."

This prayer springs from a strong faith indeed. The psalmist knows most securely what look will be on God's face when He turns it towards us. He has no fears that God may, like man, be fitful and moody. He knows that it will not be turned in anger, that the tenderness of His love cannot pass away from His face, even when He is punishing sinners with the sharpest judgments. Even in the severest wrath, that face will still fill him with such a joy and gladness as no other vision can. When Adam and Eve had sinned, and then heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. Not so the psalmist. He seeks the face of the Lord God, although he knew himself to be a sinner, although he had begun by craving mercy as a sinner, whereas Adam and Eve strove only to justify themselves. And this, dear brethren, is, after all, the truest test whether we are in the right way or not. When we have committed sin, our conscience accuses us; we feel and know that we are guilty in God's sight. The devil tells us to flee away from our offended Lord, to hide ourselves if possible from His dreadful presence. We are only too well disposed to listen to the tempter's voice. We dread nothing so much as to meet God's eyes and see His lips opening to speak to us. But if we will listen to His Spirit whispering within our hearts, we shall thrust from us the cruel and deceitful advice. We shall go forward eagerly to meet our God and say, "God be merciful to us, and bless us; and make his

face to shine upon us." There may be stern reproofs in store for us, and sharp stripes after them; but, if we are not wilfully blind, we shall see and know that the light of that countenance is the light of love, and that only that searching, all-conquering light can set us free from the bondage of our sins. That He may deliver us from sin, He will smite us still; but not the less does He greet us and bless us as His own, for He has forgiven us long ago, even before our sins were committed.

But it is not the mere turning of God's face once towards us that we want. We have need to gaze at it for ever and ever, that we may know it well. And to us, brethren, is it given to gaze upon it as no Jewish psalmist ever could. In the hymn of Simeon which goes in our prayer-book along with this 67th Psalm, uttered by him when he took the infant Jesus in his arms, he blessed God and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (thy saving health). "He that hath seen me," said Christ Himself, when He had grown to full manhood, "hath seen the Father." All the love that He showed to sinful man in taking human flesh and dying on the cross was in very deed the love of the Father. Every time that a chapter of the Gospels is read in church, a vision is set before every Christian man such as prophets desired in vain to see. God grant us strength to pray with willing hearts the prayer of David, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us."

III

THE LIGHT OF GOD'S FACE AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WAY

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and show us the light of his countenance. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations."—*Psalm* lxvii. 1, 2.

LAST Sunday I tried to explain something of the meaning of the first verse of this psalm, and at the same time to give greater clearness to the vague language in which we are apt to speak both of this and of other psalms. To-day I wish to dwell rather more fully on the last clause of the first verse, and then go on to consider the second verse, and the manner in which it is founded on the first verse. The psalmist begins with a prayer for mercy, thereby confessing himself to be one who needed mercy, and asking God to overlook his offences and listen to him not according to his deserts but according to God's own lovingkindness. He then prays that the merciful God would bless him and his people, that is, would greet them as His own, and send forth gifts and messages as tokens to show how dear they still

were to Him, and to fill their hearts with joy at the sense of His favour. Next he prays that God would make His face to shine upon them, since the sight of His face and the knowledge of His near and immediate presence was the best blessing that He could bestow upon them. He prays this in the full confidence and knowledge that God's face could not but be gracious to them and that, however great their sin might be, it was a good and not an evil thing for them to meet His face.

This third petition is a good test whether we are in the right way, whether we hate sin as we ought to do and not merely dislike and dread its unpleasant effects, whether we have genuine trust in God and are willing to bring our sins to Him, that He may root them out in whatever way may seem best to Him. The two former petitions might in a manner be offered up by men who were not really praying, who had never known in their hearts their own emptiness and God's fulness. We may cry for mercy in such a way as a fallen soldier on a battlefield cries for mercy from a furious enemy who is cutting him down with his sword ; though such would not be the psalmist's prayer to God for mercy. We may ask for blessings, meaning only that we desire to have wealth, happiness, or any other kind of good thing, and therefore begging them from Him whom we suppose to be able to give them as He pleases ; though this would be still more unlike the psalmist's prayer that God would bless him. But it is much harder to put a cold and godless sense upon a prayer for the light of God's countenance. The man who

only beseeches one whom he supposes to be his fierce enemy not to kill him, or who only begs good things from a powerful storekeeper of good things, cannot care a jot whether God's face shines upon him or not. If God will only let him alone in peace and send him no pains or troubles, if God will only send him what he desires, that is all he wants, and he has no wish to have anything more to do with God.

All this sounds very shocking, when uttered thus in a plain and naked way. And yet, dear brethren, who is there among us who dare pronounce himself guiltless of this sin? a sin I call it, for assuredly a heart which thinks thus of God has already sunk into a very deadly kind of sin and is ripe to commit any other kind of sin, when a strong-enough temptation shall assail it. Surely we must often have felt this inward gracelessness and unbelief haunting our prayers. How often have our prayers been dulled and darkened by some tinge of the hateful thought that the only use of God, I say it in all reverence, is to give us what we wish for, whether that be forgiveness of sins or an abundance of outward enjoyments! Does not the experience of every week, and most of all of every Sunday, show us what urgent need we have to ask of Christ our Saviour that which His disciples asked of Him? "Lord, teach us how to pray." Again and again must we ask for His teaching. For though we have in our hands so many true prayers of old Jewish psalmists, and above all that prayer which He Himself taught His disciples when they asked Him, we soon find that it is only too easy to put our own hard meaning into the

divine words. Those words may be of the greatest possible use to us if we endeavour to learn from them humbly and patiently how God would have us to pray. But still we have the power of speaking falsehood in true words, and unbelief in faithful words; and as our lives and our honest thoughts are, so will also the spirit of our prayers be, whatever the words of prayer may be on our lips. Those petitions which seem likely to bring us what we wish we can use in our own cold sense, and the rest we can repeat without any sense at all, wishing to pass quickly over them and get back to others which we fancy may be more practically useful.

And, when our thoughts of what is useful are thus dwarfed and fettered by a want of faith and love, what can seem more useless than the vision of the light of God's countenance? Yet, after all, it is not a forced or unnatural state of mind that we must put on if we would feel and know the force of the psalmist's prayer. We need not have recourse to Sunday doings to teach us what it means. We need only think of the mornings and evenings of the common workdays of the week, and ask whether the words do not recall something that we have felt then about men if not about God. Do we all care so little about our parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, that the mere light of their countenance never brings us any joy? Surely there is nothing which so fills us with gladness, so inspires us with strength and patience to endure the burdens and sufferings of life, if we are not utterly hardened, as the sight of human faces that we love. And, if it

is otherwise with us with respect to God, the reason is because we love Him for His own sake so little, because we only half believe that He is really there at all, because our care is only for His bounties, things which we can indeed enjoy but cannot love.

When therefore we ask to be taught how to pray, we ought above all things to ask to have implanted in us a desire to behold God's face. This desire does not come easily and naturally to most of us. Every act of sin makes it harder. Yet there is not one of us who may not learn to cherish it in his inmost heart. For God Himself is our teacher, the teacher of every one of us, of the dullest as well as of the wisest, of the most sinful as well as of the most godly. We cannot expect to pass by one sudden leap to the fulness of that blessed knowledge. But, though we may despise small beginnings, He does not: He will not quench the smoking flax, though we may despair of its ever bursting into a flame. And when we have made a little progress in learning, and been a little warmed and lightened by the brightness of His face, it will become easier to go onward. We shall soon find how strangely the brightness of His face is what gives the brightness to every other, little as we may have known it in former times: and the more we see of Him, the brighter will they seem: nay, things which before seemed altogether dark and dull, will now bear witness how His light fills all things in heaven and earth. Neither is it a mere luxury, a mere pleasure to our hearts that this vision will bring. If it were, what could it have to do with so many of us, whose life is without ceasing

one of doing and enduring? I said just now that every act of sin makes it harder to desire to see God's face. But it is no less true that the sight of God's face and the desire to see it makes every act of sin harder to commit. No joy of which God is the object can ever be a barren joy. It carries with it such a promise of help and strength as no effort of our own can ever bring.

But the psalmist not merely prays that God will turn His countenance to him and his people; but also that He will show them the *light* of His countenance. The following verse, "That thy way," etc., seems to point out that he means more than to express his belief that God's face is full of light, and to pray that the light of that face may shine upon him. It probably implies what certainly is true, that it is quite possible for us not to see God's face at all, though it is turned towards us all the while; and also that it is quite possible for us to read His face wrongly, and mistake altogether the look with which He regards us. When the sun is shining upon us, we cannot help seeing it, unless we turn our heads another way, or shut our eyes, or are afflicted with actual blindness. It is not much otherwise with the light of God's face. In one way indeed it is harder to see that, for our inward eyes are so often closed and our hearts turned away, that the sight of God can only be gained by a sturdy resolve that we will not yield to our own dark impulses. But, on the other hand, there is not much spiritual blindness which is not of our own making. Christ is standing ever before us, as He stood before blind Bartimaeus,

and saying unto us, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" and we know not what to ask. Whenever we have found out our own blindness, and say unto Him, "Lord, that I might receive my sight," Jesus saith likewise unto us, "Go thy way ; thy faith hath made thee whole," and immediately we receive our sight, and follow Jesus in the way.

But we have need not only to see God, but to see God aright : we must pray that no cloud may hide from us any part of His face. We cannot see it all in an instant : all our life long we may be learning to know it better and better, and yet there will always be more and more to know. We sometimes fancy that we know it well ; and then some strange event comes, which we dare not refer to any other but Him, and yet which disturbs all our previous notions of Him. Nevertheless we have only to be still and wait His good pleasure : and He will justify Himself at last. He will bring to nought our vain delusion that we can reckon up the manifold riches of His grace by our own narrow measure, and yet make it more and more plain that in Him is light and no darkness at all. The psalmist's prayer was a prayer for his own nation, the Jews. It was answered to them with ever increasing force, not only in the hearts of those who prayed the same prayer, but in all the changes which befel their race. It was answered completely when the Son was fully revealed in human flesh, the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person. And yet even the full light of the gospel, which has been given to us, will remain as much hidden from us as it was

from any idolater of old time, if through hardness of heart we will not come to Christ Himself to open our eyes. "If our gospel is a hidden one," says St. Paul, "the hiding hath been in them that are perishing, in whom the god of this world blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should dawn upon them." "For it is God," he repeats, "that commanded light to shine out of darkness, who shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Yet that face is not only our joy and our strength, but also our pattern. After God's likeness we were created. And if we would not spoil that image, still impressed upon us, through our own foul and dark passions, we must study without ceasing the unveiled image which God has set before us in His Son. We are not left to ourselves to struggle in the dark towards an unknown goal of goodness. The highest perfection of goodness has been wrought out on earth by Him who was born and died like one of ourselves, and endured all the trials of human existence but those of an evil heart. In beholding Him we know what God has created us to be, and what He is ever renewing us to become by the patient working of His Holy Spirit.

The closing words of the first verse in our prayer-book version, "And have mercy upon us," are absent, you will find, from the Bible version, and have doubtless slipped into this place by mistake. From the prayer that God will make His face to shine upon His people we pass easily to a prayer that His way

may be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations. The one prayer is but the necessary consequence and following out of the other. We first must see God's face, and know Him as He is, and cast off all strangeness with Him, and then learn the manner and order of His acts, and the laws by which He carries out His kingdom over the hearts and lives of men. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," said the Lord by the mouth of Isaiah. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Even when we have learned to set right and true purposes before us, yet that is not all: we are ever prone to pursue them by paths of our own invention. We use all manner of crooked and perverse means to compass rightful ends. We may know what God commands, and desire to practise it ourselves and to lead others to practise it; and yet we may go grievously astray, because we have not faith in God and the mighty workings of His Spirit or faith in other men, our brethren and His children; and therefore we think to gain our ends by what we call safe and prudent means, and keep aloof from the free and gracious wisdom of our Father in heaven. Truly our ways are not His ways; and yet no other ways than His can be right for us any more than for Him. Nor have we far to go to learn them. In everything that befals us, small or great, in all the events of our own age and of all former ages, we may trace the marks of His way, nay, He Himself is by our side to show them to us, if only we watch for

them with patient and willing hearts, and are more ready to be judged by them than to judge them. "Gracious and righteous is the Lord: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. Them that are meek shall he guide in judgment; and such as are gentle, them shall he learn his way. *All* the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies."

It is worth notice that the psalmist does not pray according to the form used in the first verse, "That *we* may know thy way," but "That thy way may be known *upon earth*." This change is very important. The psalm is a truly national prayer, a prayer for the Jews. Yet most of the better sort of Jews saw with more or less clearness that God's mercies and blessings and revelations to the Jews were not meant for their benefit alone, but for all mankind in some way or other, at some time or other. And so the prayer for Judea stretches itself out into a prayer for the whole earth. God's way had already been taught to the Jews as it had been taught to no other nation, and they had sore need to be taught it still; but how could they feel the true blessedness of such a gift without desiring that others might be partakers of it with them? The prayer goes on, "Thy saving health among all nations." The gracious virtue which generation after generation had found to dwell in the unchanging God of Abraham, the will and the power to save and heal to the uttermost, were meant for all nations, and Jews were bound to pray that they might be made known to all nations. Listen once more to the hymn which the Jew Simeon uttered

when the Son Himself had come: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy saving health, which thou didst prepare before the face of all the peoples; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." This, brethren, must likewise be our thanksgiving and our prayer. If we have in any measure truly come to know God's way and His saving health, we must desire to make all around us partakers of the same knowledge, and strive and pray earnestly that it may not be hidden from them by our sin. And when we feel most unable to receive it ourselves or show it to them, we shall best find the blessedness of casting ourselves and them on Him who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

IV

THE PRAISE OF THE PEOPLE

"Let the people praise thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise thee. O let the nations rejoice and be glad, for thou shalt judge the folk righteously, and govern the nations upon earth."—*Psalm* lxvii. 3, 4.

On two former occasions I have tried to bring before you something of the force of the first two verses of this psalm: "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and shew us the light of his countenance; that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations." The prayer here turns to praise: "Let the people praise thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise thee." I said that this psalm was most plainly and strongly a national song, even more than most of the psalms are national songs. That character comes out distinctly in this third verse. The prayer of the first verse was for the Jewish nation; "God be merciful unto *us*, and bless *us*; and shew *us* the light of his countenance." In the second verse it stretched itself out to take in the other nations of the earth, "That thy way may be known upon *earth*, thy saving health among *all nations*." Here in the

third verse we return to the same point on which we stood. It is again praise on the part of the Jewish nation: "Let *the people* praise thee, O God; yea, let all *the people* praise thee." It is quite a different word from what we have in the second verse for "all nations," that is, the Gentile nations who were outside the Jewish government. The people of the third verse should rather be the *peoples*, that is, the tribes. "Let the tribes praise thee, O God; yea, let all the tribes praise thee." It is not easy for us to enter thoroughly into the meaning which would have been conveyed to the mind of an ancient Jew by this simple phrase, 'the tribes.' Those of you who have ever looked at a map of the Holy Land must have seen it marked out into a number of divisions like our English counties. And yet if we put the word counties here instead of tribes, we should not get a very full or distinct meaning. In the very next psalm, the 68th, at the twenty-seventh verse, we have four of the tribes mentioned in connection with a solemn worship and praise of God. "Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, from the fountain of Israel. There is little Benjamin their ruler, the princes of Juda their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali." If the names of four English counties, such as Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Suffolk, and Norfolk, were put into a hymn to God, we should all think it very odd. Not, I hope, merely because we do not often see modern names put into prayers or praises; for there would be nothing really strange, much less wrong, in saying, "Let England praise thee, O God." But we do not join any

distinct notions to our different counties, so that to bring in their names would be strange, simply because it would be unmeaning. But it was quite different with the Jewish tribes. They were not merely certain pieces of land like counties, or the inhabitants of certain pieces of land, but enormous families, the members of each being descended from one common ancestor. The book of Genesis tells us about the twelve sons of Jacob, and we find from the following books that their families were kept quite distinct when they came up out of Egypt and wandered through the wilderness into the land of Canaan; and, when they reached Canaan, they were divided all over the country, all except the priestly tribe of Levi, each tribe having its own piece of land allotted to it. In the 33rd chapter of Deuteronomy we have the blessing which Moses pronounced before his death upon all the twelve tribes of Israel, and its language shows how completely the blessing upon the whole people was felt to be bound up with the special blessings upon each tribe. "The Lord came from Sinai," it begins, "and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from Mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of his saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them. Yea, he loved the people (or rather, the tribes); all his saints are in thy hand, and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words. Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob: and he was king in Jeshurun" (that is, the Jewish nation), "when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together." Then

begin the blessings on each tribe. "Let Reuben live, and not die, and let not his men be few. And this is the blessing of Judah: and he said, 'Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him, and be thou an help to him from his enemies.'" And so on with the other tribes. And a similar blessing on the whole people comes back at the end. "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee, and shall say, 'Destroy them.' Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew. Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places." Such was the blessing of Moses upon the tribes, and the spirit of it runs through all the following history. The greatest pains were taken to prevent one tribe from mixing freely with another, and equal pains were taken to bind them all together into one people. Nay, strange as it may seem at first sight, the very separation of the tribes helped to bind them together. Each single Jew was obliged to keep always in mind that he belonged to one particular tribe, and that not so much because he lived in one particular part of the country, as because that was his father's and his

grandfather's tribe, and so on upwards till he came to the son of Jacob who had given his name to the tribe; and that first father of his tribe was, he well knew, own brother to the first fathers of the other tribes. Thus he was always reminded that they all were children of Jacob or Israel, and therefore were in fact all one great family.

We can now understand better what the psalmist meant by the words, "Let the tribes praise thee, O God." Let the several branches or cousinhoods in the one great family of Israel all join their differing voices together as one united people to praise the God who blesses all and each, who has appointed to each its own place in the land with its special produce of corn or vines or pastures, and has given the whole people one holy law, one blessed worship in tabernacle or temple, and preserved them from the enemies without who have striven to destroy them.

But the verse goes on, "Yea, let all the tribes praise thee." This is, I think, something more than the first part of the verse repeated more strongly. That little word 'all' is the echo of a sad long long tale which fills up a large part of the Old Testament. Although the twelve tribes made up together one people, they were always forgetting this; always doing something or other to break the holy bonds by which God had purposed to unite them to each other. The different kinds of country occupied by different tribes helped to make them unlike each other, to join them together in groups of two or three, and at the same time sever such groups from the rest. But their own evil passions, jealousies, and

idolatries had far more to do with their separation. There were endless quarrels for a long line of years, till at last, as we know, under Rehoboam, the fourth king, the nation split into two parts, and a kingdom of Israel was set up against the kingdom of Judah.

It is difficult to say exactly when the 67th Psalm was written. If it was written after the division of the two kingdoms, these last words of the third verse will have a very marked meaning. But the same meaning may be supposed to lie in them to a less degree, even if the psalm was written earlier; for that great outward separation was but the complete carrying out of quarrels and inward separations which had been going on for a long while before. "Let the tribes praise thee, O God; yea, let all the tribes praise thee." In many of the outward things of life the tribes were split in twain; they belonged to different kings, in part they even worshipped different gods. Yet the Lord God, the God of Israel, was still one God, the God of the one nation, though many might have forgotten Him. In His sight they still were one, though they had tried to sever themselves from each other, and though they seemed to have succeeded. In worshipping God, the psalmist could not bear to think of himself as a citizen of only a piece of a nation: he feels himself to belong to the whole nation, to the tribes which were separated from his tribe as much as to the rest. His own praise of God on behalf of all is a prayer that all may praise God together, and thus once more be joined together in the closest and strongest of all bonds.

It is possible that some of us may think so strongly national a prayer and praise unfit for Christian men: they may feel impatient of any teaching which does not speak expressly of Christ dying to save sinful men. That is indeed the most blessed part of God's message to man; and yet I fear that it is a sign that we have not received it rightly and truly, if it gives us a distaste for any other part of God's message. Brethren, I feel that I can never sufficiently thank God for placing me in a Church, and I entreat you to thank Him for placing you in a Church, which brings before its members the whole unbroken Bible, which causes lessons to be read at every service out of both Testaments, and gives Christian men old Jewish psalms to use in the worship of God. If we use these psalms honestly, we shall find that they, like the rest of the Old Testament, not merely speak out for us the deepest wants of our hearts each for himself alone, but teach us to think of our common weekday life, and, above all, of the country and nation to which we belong, as cared for by God and fit subjects to enter into even our warmest communion with Christ through the Holy Ghost. If any man says that they have nothing to do with his religion, not I, but the Bible answers, "So much the worse for his religion." He must be a very poor sort of Christian, aye and a very unspiritual Christian, who does not care for the nation to which he belongs, who does not remember dear old England and all that belong to her in his inmost prayers to God. There are times in all history—our own is surely one of them—when it is

very hard to remember that we do all indeed form one nation, when it is still harder to approach God as one nation and worship Him as the God of England, even as He was the God of the Jews. But this should only the more excite each one of us to strive against the difficulty, and to cherish in ourselves every thought which may make us feel how closely God has joined us together. In this respect our prayers in Church may be a great help to us. Here we all meet in the house of God, not of any one man, but of us all, so far as it belongs to any except God, which has been filled with English worshippers through at least four hundred years of manifold and wondrous events to the English nation, and which holds the font in which English babes have been baptized for at least seven hundred years; and we join together with one mouth to offer up the same prayers to God in that English tongue which is one of the most precious heirlooms from past generations to every man, woman, and child in the land, however ignorant they may be of all besides. These thoughts surely may help us to pray, "Let the people praise thee, O God." But have we need to finish that verse? Has "Yea, let all the people praise thee" any special force for us? Not exactly such as it had for the Jews. If there is one thing more than another for which the people of England has need to praise God, it is that He has enabled us to continue one undivided nation, that we have had for the last four hundred years so few civil wars, and that the breaches which those few had made have been so fully healed. But I fear

there are dreadful divisions of other kinds among us, divisions of one class or rank against another, of one religion or communion or party against another, private and inward jealousies and suspicions on all sides; everyone only too ready to strive only for his own good, or at best that of his family or immediate neighbours, and forgetful of the mass of his countrymen and the country itself. We must be ready to cast away all these roots of bitterness before we can truly pray, "O God, let all the people praise thee." And yet till then all our prayers must be selfish and unlike the prayers which God desires of us.

And if we are learning to praise God as one nation, then we shall know the full meaning of the next verse, "O let the nations rejoice and be glad; for thou shalt judge the folk righteously, and govern the nations upon earth." As the psalmist's prayer for mercy and blessing upon Israel went on in the second verse into a prayer that God's way and His saving health might be revealed to all the nations of the earth, so in this fourth verse his praise on behalf of all the tribes of Israel becomes the utterance of a hope of joy and gladness to all the nations of the earth. Such a psalm as this is the best possible answer to those who say that we owe no special love and thought to our own nation, and that all such feelings can only render us harsh and spiteful against foreigners. It was not so with the psalmist. He did not profess to love all equally. He loved the Jews best, and prayed for them first, and offered praise with them first. But he could not bear to shut up the light of God's face and the gladness

which it must engender to those who suffer it to shine into their hearts, as the private property of any one people, though it were his own people. He longed and prayed that all the earth might see the light and rejoice in the light. But mark the ground of this hope of his. He saw that God even then did not leave the nations to their own sin and misery, that He was leading and governing them after His own holy way, though they did not know His way and fancied they were going their own way; and, above all, he saw that God was judging them righteously. This fact, that God the righteous judge was executing judgment among them, putting down one and setting up another, was the pledge that God would one day reveal the inward springs of His righteousness to their hearts, and that they would see it and be glad. We too may take to ourselves, each for himself, the psalmist's hope for the nations. It is a rotten and worthless faith which does not *first* rejoice in God's righteousness. But when we can own the presence of His judgments upon us, giving sentence for good or evil with perfect justice, we may rightly believe that His good tidings will soon find full access to our hearts, and that we shall soon find the light of His countenance to be indeed the source of every joy.

V

COMMUNION WITH GOD IN PRAISE FOR THE INCREASE OF THE EARTH

"LET the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth bring forth her increase: and God, even our own God, shall give us his blessing. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the world shall fear him."—*Psalm* lxvii. 5-7.

ON three former occasions I have spoken to you on the earlier verses of this psalm. The latter three I have kept for to-day, because they suit well a time when the work, in which many of us have now for some weeks been engaged, has been brought to a close. We must not, however, treat them as if they stood alone. They most truly and intimately belong to the psalm, being closely connected with the parts which we have examined before; and indeed the whole psalm is the best possible approach to the subject which is more expressly brought before us to-day. The prayer for God's mercy and blessing, and the light of His face upon us, that His way may be known upon earth, His saving health among all other nations; and the praises sung by our own

people united as one, leading to a prayer that all other nations may be led by His righteous government of all mankind to praise Him too, carry us rightly and fitly to thanksgivings for God's outward and more earthly gifts. The fifth verse is the same as the third. "Let the people praise thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise thee." It brings us back to home from the other nations far and near which the fourth verse had brought within the reach of our prayers. The thought of God's righteous government upon earth arose naturally from the praises which the psalmist desired to hear sung not only by his own countrymen but by the men of all countries: but it was not the proper subject of his psalm. He must now return nearer home, even to the point from which he had started, that is, his own people, and the praises which he uttered on their behalf. Let the people, let the different tribes of Israel, praise thee, O God; yea, let all tribes, the whole united people, praise thee. This is the true burden of his song, the perfect end in which all partial prayers and partial thanksgivings are fulfilled.

But this high and heavenly song, the same in which angels join, is not too high for the lips of ordinary people, whose life is spent in handling the things of the earth. It takes its rise from the thought of a harvest. For what says the next verse? "Then shall the earth bring forth her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us." The words as they stand here are true and important. God's outward blessings, as well as His inward favour, will be found upon a nation which is at one with itself,

and praises Him with all its heart, believing that He is the giver of every good thing that it enjoys. While a nation that believes only in the seed or the soil or the rain or the sunshine, which forgets that they are only the tools with which God works, and feels no thankfulness to Him for them, is sure to suffer the loss of some of them, not only as a punishment for their ungratefulness, but that they may perchance at last learn who it was that had been their hidden friend, and turn to Him with singleness of heart. Or again we may take the verse in this way: "The earth hath brought forth her increase: may God, even our own God, bless us." It would seem that the psalm was originally written on the occasion of an abundant harvest in the land of Israel. And, if this be so, it must be a good thing for us to see what thoughts and prayers could be suggested to the heart of a God-fearing Jew in old times by such an event. In any case it is good for us to see how he could keep his prayers and praises from losing their firm hold upon his own self, and how thoroughly he meant what he said in the earlier verses, since they could so easily pass into thoughts about the earth and its yield of corn. The psalm may thus be of great use to us in two respects, in teaching us the right way to pray to God and praise Him, and in teaching us the right way to think about harvests.

First, about prayer. Our prayer is too often only begging God to give us certain things that we wish for, because we know that He has the power of giving them, and we fancy that He requires to be prayed

to a great deal before He will give them. When this is the case, our praise becomes not less hard and worthless: it means only that we fear God will grudge giving us in future anything else that we wish, if we do not give Him thanks for what He has already bestowed upon us. It is not perhaps very easy to describe in words the difference between such prayer and praise and those of the psalm. But every one who will read it carefully, and who will think over the different tempers in which he has ever asked any kindness from either God or man, cannot help feeling that the difference is immense. The psalm brings us face to face with God Himself, not with His gifts. No one else put in the place of Him would be of the least avail, whatever gifts He might have to bestow. What we have before us is man and a nation of men holding close converse with the God in whose image they are all made. In such converse all created things which are not a part of man, but only given for the use of man, seem for the moment forgotten; just as, when sickness or any other great occasion brings any two of us far nearer to each other than it is scarcely possible to remain in the regular business of life, all the petty things which at other times please us or annoy us are dropped out of mind, we scarcely know how, and nothing is allowed to come between the two human spirits which wish only to take hold of and be taken hold of by the other. Just so it is in prayer and praise, in such prayer and praise as we find in this psalm. It is converse with one far far above us, and therefore

the converse takes the form of asking, and of giving thanks. But to make God's height above us an excuse for not opening our whole heart to Him and seeking to know His heart, is in fact to deny and reject the living way to Himself which He has given us in Jesus Christ His Son, the mediator of God and man. This converse with God must therefore be the first thing in all our prayers and praises. We should desire His gifts less than His love which bestows the gifts, and the gifts themselves chiefly as tokens of His love and favour. And when once we have learned to pray in this spirit, we shall pray for those things which *He* must chiefly desire, even more than for those things which we have been desiring ourselves. Whatever comfort and delight we have found ourselves in seeking Him for His own sake, we must wish that others also may enjoy who have not yet known Him as He truly is. Thus all our prayers, whatever it may be that we are praying for, will lose the dry and heartless character of mere begging. God and man will be in them all. Only we must not think that the mere joining on of others to ourselves is always in itself a sure mark of a true and divine prayer. That too may be put on by mere calculation: we may easily come to think that we may induce God to listen to us more readily if we pray at the same time for others. But a prayer coming from such a motive is still worth little; it has obviously nothing to do with any real love of others for their own sake, and therefore cannot spring from love of God for His own sake.

Once more, our prayers and praises may be wrong in quite a different, it might almost seem an opposite way. We may dwell so much on converse with God, or rather on the mere states of mind and ways of feeling and speaking which we suppose to belong to converse with God, as to keep it at a distance from our daily actions, and so from influencing them or being influenced by them. This *seems* to come from reverence for God and unwillingness to mix Him up with all the pettinesses and homelinesses, and, as it were, defilements of life. But this is a deadly mistake. There need not be any profaneness in thinking of Him along with anything that we do, but there is very great profaneness in trying to shut our worship of Him into a little world of its own, into which we enter but now and then, and leave all other things to chance or the devil. In that case our own desires will secretly get the mastery over us, and the evil will be disguised from us by the very fact that we shall pride ourselves on special nearness to God. For after all we cannot help fearing this thing, desiring that, and almost every day brings with it some new object to occupy our minds. What we need is, not to have these thoughts rooted out, but to draw them within our converse with God ; then and then only will they be turned into right prayers, and God will be felt to be indeed the Author of our life and of all that is therein.

So much for the lesson which the psalm may teach us about prayer and praise. Its lesson about harvests comes to nearly the same thing, though it approaches the matter from a different side. "The

earth hath given forth her increase." There is no hiding here of obvious facts about the corn which the Israelites had just been gathering in. It had not suddenly appeared in the night, no one knowing from whence. The earth had brought it forth. They had sowed seed in the earth, and the earth had given them back all that they had sown, and a great deal more ; it had given them an increase. During the months since the seed had been sown, all the powers of nature had been acting upon it. The clouds had poured down rain that it might swell and sprout in the earth ; and, when at last the tender plant had shot above ground, it had been helped on by cool nights and warm days as it grew up to perfection, first the blade, then the ear, then the full ripe corn in the ear. Nor had the labour of men's hands been wanting. Men had prepared the ground, sown the seed, reaped the corn, and laid it safely by. Thus with human help mere natural means had produced the crop in which they were all rejoicing ; and yet the psalmist obviously thought of it as sent direct from God. And surely he was right. Surely it was not less His blessed and precious gift because He had caused man and nature to join with Him in His work of creation, and thus, as it were, made His own giving a part not only of the harvest itself, but of all that had gone before in producing the harvest.

Some may perhaps think this a strange subject to come into a psalm, and would expect it to speak only of spiritual blessings. Let us thank God that it is not so, that He has given us this as well as many other proofs that He cares for our bodies and

their necessities as well as for our spirits : let us rejoice that He who taught us to pray, " Our Father which art in heaven, give us this day our daily bread," has also taught us to speak of the increase of the earth, and of the light of God's countenance and His saving health in the same breath.

And we, brethren, have great need this year to learn the meaning of this harvest psalm. God has given us such abundant and healthy crops that we should be thankful to Him for thus teaching us to praise Him as we ought to do. This great gift of His may be to many of us the beginning of a new life, if it leads us to see in it a mark that He is with us still, striving with tender love to win us over to His gracious purposes. But instead of a blessing it will be a curse to all those who enjoy it without thought or thankfulness, hardening their hearts yet more, and making them more careless whether they are partakers of God's love, since they receive their share of the good things which He gives even to the unthankful and the evil. It may be that some among us will profit more than others, but still in some measure the boon will be to all. This indeed is one of the greatest blessings connected with a good harvest, that it makes itself felt under every roof through the length and breadth of the land, and thus it becomes one link more to bind all the dwellers in the land more closely together as one nation, and so fulfil the prayer that not only the people, but all the people may praise God.

The same spirit runs through the rest of the verse: " May God, even our own God, bless us." The prayer

of the first verse comes back again. We pray that God will bless us, this English people, as the psalmist prayed Him to bless the Jewish people. But now we call upon Him not only as God, but as "our own God." "If ye walk in my statutes," He declared by Moses in Leviticus xxvi., "and keep my commandments, and do them; then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, . . . and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. . . . For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you. . . . And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people." That promise stands sure to us as it did to the Jews. God is not only the God of each single creature among us, but the God of us all together; and we all, the Queen's subjects, are His people. Week after week we claim this name in our prayers. In the Litany, after we have prayed for the Queen, the Royal Family, the Clergy, Privy Council, Nobility, and Magistrates, who all in various ways take part in guiding our people, we pray for the whole people itself, as a people which has the Lord for its God, "That it may please Thee to bless and keep all Thy people": and then, carrying our thoughts across the seas, pray God to give to *all* nations unity, peace, and concord. This, too, is the order of the psalm at the end as at the beginning. "God, even our own God, bless us. God bless us, and let all the ends of the world fear him." The prayer for ourselves becomes ungodly, if we forget our people before God: the

prayer for our people becomes ungodly, if we forget mankind before God. May He give us that love of Himself, which can alone teach us how to pray for ourselves or our brethren, and which was perfectly shown forth in His Son dying at His command for us all.

In memory of that perfect fulfilment of Divine love, we offer to-day, brethren, on God's table, the produce of the earth—bread from its corn, and wine from its grapes—as a sign that we believe the earth and all its fulness to be His, and therefore very good; and that we own them as His gift by presenting them before Him in our highest worship; and, having offered them, we ourselves partake of them in His presence. Thus they become most wonderful signs, connecting the powers of nature and the daily works of man with the sacrifice of the Son of God Himself, reminding us that, wherever we go, we are walking on holy ground. Let us then draw near with faith, and eat this holy sacrament not to our terror, but to our comfort, believing that He who has given for our bodies this abundant harvest is now inviting our spirits to feed on the true bread from heaven, even on Him which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world.

VI

THE SOWER

"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God."—*Luke* viii. 11.

WE have as the gospel for to-day[1] the parable of the Sower. Perhaps, taking it altogether, it is the easiest of all our Lord's parables: and happily it is also the pattern of them all, the one by which the rest are best explained. This and the parable of the Tares are the only parables of which our Lord gave an express explanation. This was to all appearance the first which He uttered; and, when He had spoken it, as we learn from St. Mark, He said to His disciples, "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?" It thus stands out as commended to our attention in an especial way.

Let us then suppose that same question to be addressed to us: let us think of Christ as asking us, "Know ye not this parable?" Assuredly we shall

[1] Sexagesima.

not know it in any sense worth mentioning, unless we fix our minds steadily upon it, and think about it very seriously. Nay, we may go farther than that, and say that we shall not know it till we have tried to *act* some of its lessons in practice. For, as all our Lord's teaching is most truly practical, so it is only when we begin to try to live according to its spirit that the best part of its meaning becomes clear and vivid to our minds. And even before we try to put it into practice, when we are, for instance, in church as we are to-day, listening to the parable itself, or to a sermon upon it, our best chance of understanding it is to compare it, step by step, with what we have already known of ourselves and our own hearts and our own lives.

The first thing that must strike us in hearing the parable is the description of the different kinds of ground on which the sower sowed his seed, and of what became of the seed in each of these cases. We are too apt to take for granted that each kind of soil can only stand for some one set of men ; so that we might call one class of men around us the way side, and another the rock, and another the thorny ground, and another the good ground. But when we do this, we are almost sure to place ourselves in neither of these classes. We can hardly presume to compare ourselves to the good soil ; but neither are we willing to allow that *we* belong to the way side or the rock or the thorns. Thus the parable becomes no lesson to us : we cease to have a place in it. Now it would be wrong to deny that there are persons who might on the whole be not unjustly described by these

different names. But at least that is not the most useful way to read the parable.

Let us begin at the beginning. We hear first of the sower himself. "A sower went out to sow his seed." Who is this sower? Neither St. Luke nor any other of the Evangelists tell us precisely who is meant in this parable. Christ Himself says that the *seed* is the word of God: and so we are sometimes led to think that by the sower must be meant God's ministers, ministers of His word, as they are often called, whose duty it is to preach and set forth the word. This is no doubt a true and lawful application of the language of Scripture; but assuredly it is not the first meaning of the parable. We may, I think, borrow the explanation from the next parable, that of the Tares. There is every probability that the sower here is the same as he who sowed good seed in his field, but was injured by his enemy sowing tares with the wheat. Now we are plainly told by Christ that "He that soweth the seed is the Son of Man." *He* without doubt is the Sower here. The parable is about Christ Himself, not merely about what He did or said as a Sower in the days of His flesh when He dwelt among us, but about His sowings before He became man from the beginning of the world till that day, and his sowings from the time of His ascension till now, the sowings which He is daily and hourly making among ourselves.

But how does He sow His seed? Assuredly not by the lips alone. If the heavenly sowing meant only sounds spoken by the lips, how little by comparison would be included in it? How much is

there which influences us to the highest degree which is never actually *spoken* to us! The ground spoken of cannot be the *ear*. That is a mere passage to our hearts and minds, to our true selves. And it is there, there within, that the sower is to be found. Whether it be the Divine Sower sowing only good seed, or the enemy sowing tares, neither of them can be outside of us, both must be at work within our hearts. He who sows the good seed is the same that made the ear and made the heart too.

As we learn from the parable, and indeed as we might see for ourselves, it makes a wonderful difference what becomes of the seed; some perishes at once, some lives awhile and then perishes, some lives for evermore. But whatever becomes of the seed, He, the sower, is always the same, and He has a hand in every part of the process. We know that the seed would not sprout and bring forth corn except it fell into the ground, and it is He that gives power to the ground to swell and burst the seed, and then He also puts in the seed to meet the power which He has already put into the ground. He fashions all our hearts such that they may receive His blessed truth. He not only made us, but made us to be His own tillage, to be at every step of our lives under His own constant care. And then He sows in us the good seed of His word that we may bring forth fruit to His glory, even the fruit of good living.

Thus, brethren, you see the reach of the parable is very wide. It goes further than any voices of men. True though it be that men, and especially God's

ministers, are as it were sowers under Him, preaching and declaring His truth, yet their voices only reach a very little way, they are heard for only a very short time out of the whole of our lives. The true Heavenly Sower's work is everywhere and at all times. The parable is true not only of church-goers, but of all. They may try to keep out of earshot of the preacher's voice, or any other human voice which speaks to them of God and His holy law; but they cannot move themselves out of the reach of the true Sower. There is not one, be he ever so ignorant, who can plead that he has received no seed from above. It does not rest with him whether it is sown in his heart or not,—God takes care of that; what does rest with him is *how* he receives it and how he suffers it to live and grow. "Take heed how ye hear," says Christ. Though no human lips may have spoken God's message, yet all in one way or another have heard the Son of Man's voice.

Mark the words, "the Son of Man's voice," for they are important words; the Gospel says expressly that "He that soweth the seed is the *Son of Man*." For though the voice be from heaven, it is not a voice out of clouds and thunder nor out of fire. The Lord speaks to us in the still small voice of our own nature. The gospel teaches us that the last and fullest showing forth of God's glory, and telling forth of God's nature and God's will, was made in the form of a lowly man. The Son of God is known to us as the Son of Man. And with this agree most of the other ways in which the divine message comes to us, the divine seed is sown within us, in the ordinary

course of things. All of us one way or another hear the Son of Man's voice, because all of us too are children of men. God is near us, the angels are near us, the outward world in all its brightness and all its terror is near us. But nothing is so plainly and unmistakably near us from our birth to our death as our fellow creatures; through them, and in one sense from them, we receive by far the greater part of that which makes us what we are. Of men we are born, among men we live, to men we ourselves give birth, the death of men we die, and each of these several steps in our being is full of voices from the Son of Man, seed of His sowing. When we feel the pressure of poverty or lie helpless with sickness or ache at heart with sorrow, at each moment He is sowing something within us which we had not there before, and which, if it falls on a soft and fruitful soil, will help to make the rest of our lives rich with heavenly graces; as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "Afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised by the present pain."

But if the Sower be busy in the common *chances* of human life, He is not less busy in the most lasting and unchangeable parts of our lives on earth, the ties which bind us to our own families. At times these ties of blood or marriage may, sad to say, appear to us as a curse resting upon us, a burden which we for a moment at least long to fling off and be what we call free: we had rather live alone, we say, than be tied through life to others whom we have not chosen, or whom, if we *have* chosen, we would choose no more. Yet then and there the Son of Man is sowing His

seed. In making us feel the bonds of human kin, though it be by their pressure, He is dropping into our hearts the beginnings of a life of peace and love such as we have not known before. And surely we cannot mistake His presence and His work, when the reaction has begun, when we feel once more in those very bonds of kindred against which we chafed, a never failing source of joy springing up around us from hour to hour. Such joy is joy from above, a wholly good seed, meant by the Son of Man, like every other seed of His, to be cherished till it grows and becomes fruitful.

Nay, we may go further in still, into the secret chambers where no outward thing, even no outward person, can enter, and still we shall find the Son of Man at His work. Where we discover in ourselves any struggle against evil, any high desire, however mixed with earthly elements, accomplished or unaccomplished, there, if we search diligently and do not cast it out, we shall find the seed of His sowing. Out of them it is His purpose, if we do not baffle it, that heavenly plants shall hereafter spring.

Every one here knows that he has felt such movements within him, and therefore that the Son of Man has been with him. But who is there, of those *not* here, of whom we dare deny the same? Who is there, ever so vile, who in the midst of the foulest sensuality, of the coldest and most heartless pride, bears not at least the human face? And that human face is a sign of a human heart within, blackened and rotted though it be with sin. A face like that, a heart like that, only without their scars and stains,

the Son of Man bore when He lived and died on earth. And there now, be sure, He does not cease His patient never-ending task. Any consciousness of a fall from righteousness, any hope—even any thought—of rising to the better and the purer life is sown by Him. It may be snatched away as it lies on the very edge and surface of his heart by evil men or evil spirits, it may grow for a while and then be parched up and vanish, it may be choked by the thicket of cares which grow so rankly in that unwholesome soil; but the seed was from above and might have grown to a tree of life. The soil of the heart was the Son of Man's: He was sowing His own ground.

Because then the parable says that the seed is the word of God, we must not fancy that it is only the Bible: in that sense we could hardly understand the parable at all. Not to speak of heathens, how many are there in our own land, nay, perhaps, how many among ourselves, who never hear the Scripture! How few come to church to hear it read! Of those who do not come to church, how few read it at home! Some, an increasing number, have heard it in childhood, but many have not. All such lose most precious seed. But, as I said just now, they are not unvisited by the Sower. God's voice is not heard only through His book. The word of God is whatever God speaks. What He says to man by His book after all is spoken to man's heart: and He can, when He will, speak straight to that without any book coming between. Some find it hard to believe that God can ever speak to evil men: they forget

that the difference between good and evil men lies in *how* they hear, whether they heed, whether they act on what they have heard. It is the same good seed that is sown, whether it grows or perishes.

I have said so much of the Sower and His seed, that there is little space left for describing the different soils. But surely, if we have any knowledge of ourselves, we can understand them without much explaining. Do we not all know all those soils by what we have at different times felt within ourselves? Have we not felt and known that seeds from God were dropped on the outside of our careless hearts, and yet let them lie there without us, taking no care of them, till in a week or a day or, it may be, an hour, we looked and lo they were gone? They had no hold upon us, and so in a moment they were carried away without our making any resistance, and before they had time to strike any roots within us.

Again, we must, I am sure, have received other seed easily and perhaps gladly. To all appearance, nay, in our own eyes, we have not been hard, we have been even soft-hearted, giving way quickly to any emotion, religious or natural, ready to let our tears flow easily as well as to laugh easily, brimming over with a certain warmth and quickness of life on the surface; and yet we had no steady resolve, no resolute conflict and struggle with evil thoughts, no quiet bearing of what disturbed our ease. Beneath the warm soft surface there was an inner rock of hard selfishness, and so the seed grew quickly after a manner with a thin feverish growth; but when the sun shone, there was no depth of moistureto

feed it below, and so it withered away. Again, we all have our cares, the cares common to man, the cares of our own station or employment in life, the cares which each man has and he alone. We cannot change our place ; but we can see that there is free space round every seed that God has sown : else, as we know only too well, the plant of God's sowing will most surely be choked and killed.

Nay, and the good ground too : was there not that within us which resisted all these evil ways? Have we not known by the honest voice of conscience that our hearts were not hopelessly condemned to be dusty highways, or thinly covered rocks, or thickets of thorns ; that God had indeed prepared the soil as well as sown the seed, and was willing to help us to till it and keep it fruitful? Yes, brethren, however men may be divided, each of us has all the soils in his heart, and he has the Sower always with him. God's ministers may explain His sayings, His Bible may explain them better still ; but it is within that the true Word of words is sounding. And, though the corn has failed, He will sow other, for He neither faints nor is weary. Whatever resists is not from Him but from the enemy, and therefore is doomed to destruction. When we learn not to harden our hearts against the blessed influences of His Spirit, then all barrenness and failure will cease.

VII

THE TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS

"THEN was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."—*Matthew* iv. 1-4.

TWO Sundays ago, brethren, we read in the book of Genesis how Adam and Eve fell by listening to the evil counsels of the serpent who tempted them. We also heard how God pronounced judgment on all three, and fixed for each their place and their punishment for the time to come. In that early day it was already seen what evil might come to men from the tempter, what power he had to estrange them from God by poisoning their minds. But his power was not unbounded. God declared that Adam and Eve and their future children were not given up helpless into the serpent's power. Nevertheless, as they had listened to his deceitful voice, they would

still be liable to suffer grievous harm from him. Wherever any child of man went, whatever was his path of life, there the tempter would always be found lurking in the dust beneath his feet, seeking only an occasion to bite and injure him. Such attempts would often succeed. The serpent would often prevail to bruise the heel of the woman's seed. But he was still a lower creature. The seed of the woman would be able to set his heel on the tempter's head and bruise that with a far more deadly hurt. Man would have strength to resist temptation: at times he would refuse to sin against his Lord. Then the tempter's power would suffer loss. Every act of faith and righteousness would encourage others, there would be on the whole a steady advance from darkness to light. And those words, brethren, have been fulfilling themselves from that day to this: and yet it has been hard to believe them true. It was so in the old world, and it is so now. For indeed it is but too true that the tempter's venomous bite spreads upwards from the heel, and we feel the poison in every vein: and again we find him so strong, so constantly and steadily strong, rising up again against us after a while after every defeat, that it seems as if the bruises which we can inflict on his head were slight indeed.

But, thanks be to God, there has been one among the sons of men, of whom God's words spoken at the beginning of the world are fully and exactly true. A seed of the woman has come, whose heel and that alone the tempter was able to wound, and who prevailed to give him a deadly hurt, from which he

never can rise up altogether. Henceforth we know that he is indeed under Christ's feet, and therefore under ours, and so we may be assured that he will never be able to prevail against us, except by neglect and fault of our own.

This crushing of the serpent's head by Christ our Lord we read in the Gospel for to-day, or rather the early part of it, the beginning of what was completed when He rose from the dead. It is what we call the Temptation. Whatever struggle any human creature since the world began has ever had with the power of sin was gathered up in that. It is a perfect picture of the temptation of all mankind, but also it is the temptation which did not succeed in any wise, which sent the tempter away in disappointment and shame.

The season of Lent, on which we entered last Wednesday, is appointed in memory of this our Lord's temptation. I have spoken of it to you before as a time for remembering with sorrow our sins, and seeking God's blessed gift of repentance. But it does not leave us to the dreary work of counting up our offences all alone. It bids us think first who not only died for our sins but also was tempted to sin even as we are. We say, and we say truly, that no man can really enter into the trials of another, so as to be able to judge him fairly. Each has his own besetting sins and therefore his own besetting temptations; and thus there is nothing which places us so completely alone in the world as the thought of our own struggles, successful or unsuccessful, against the evil one. But even here it is

not God's will that we should be alone. He sent His Son upon earth that He might be with us, and that we might know that He is with us wherever we are, even in our loneliest and most desolate hours. As the hymn says, "Christ leads us through no darker rooms, than He went through before." The Bible does not at all encourage us to have our eyes always turned inwards upon ourselves. That is not a wholesome kind of spiritual life. Whenever we *must* look in upon ourselves, as sometimes we must lest we be lost unawares, we are taught to let our first thought be of Christ. When once we have a firm hold on Him, we may venture to look down into the depths of our own hearts.

The temptation of which we read in the Gospel happened at a remarkable time in our Lord's life. He had just before received baptism from John in the river Jordan. As He had risen up out of the water, the heaven had seemed to open, and a dove came down and rested upon Him as a sign of the Spirit which was given to Him without measure. At the same moment a voice was heard from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." At this time He was, as we know from St. Luke, about thirty years old. He was going to begin what we call His ministry, the work which His Father had given Him to do in going about among the people. The first and most needful thing for Him to do was to show that He was not separate from them in anything. John was inviting all who felt the weight and burden of their sins to repent, to come to him and be baptized and receive thereby

the assurance of God's ready forgiveness of their sins, and start afresh on their life as new men. Christ had no burden of sins of His own to bear, but that only made Him feel more painfully the burden of His people's sins: on Him was laid the iniquity of all. He went therefore into the waters of the Jordan as they did, not choosing in any way to stand apart from them, but desiring to fulfil every act of righteousness which was due from them as due also from Himself. And as He came up again, God bore witness to Him in a wonderful manner. When the dove was seen to rest upon Him in the eyes of all, it was made known that the Spirit was resting upon Him within—the spirit of innocence and gentleness and peace; and God in heaven declared that He was indeed His Son, His beloved Son: and more than that, a Son without the least shadow of undutifulness or disobedience, a Son in whom His love had to struggle with no wayward opposition, but on whom it could rest freely and without hindrance, a Son who answered exactly to His own mind and will, in short, a Son in whom He was well pleased. We must not for a moment suppose that the Holy Spirit of peace had not rested on Jesus till that day. Assuredly it was with Him all His days, even as may be seen in His conduct when He was found in the temple and in His life afterwards in His mother's family. Still less dare we think that He then for the first time became God's well beloved Son, when we know that He was begotten before all worlds, and that on that same day in the temple He was about His Father's business.

But He then was owned by God before the eyes of men as His Son, and marked out for the work of His ministry by the sign of a heavenly calling.

Yet there was a season of preparation through which even He must needs pass, before He could be fitted to begin to preach the glad news of God's kingdom. He came to put the finishing stroke to that which God's servants and prophets had been performing for His people Israel through long ages, and that discipline and severe schooling by which they had been fitted for their task He too would not disdain. When the people in their journeyings through the wilderness came to Mount Sinai, and Moses went up into the barren mountain to receive the law of the Lord, he was there alone forty days and forty nights ; he did neither eat bread nor drink water. Thus was he prepared to be God's mouthpiece in speaking forth the ten commandments, and all the other laws which should guide the people in the years to come. Time went by, and at last the law was not enough for the people's guidance. They needed the voice of living prophets to speak to them the word of the Lord. In the reign of the wicked and cruel king Ahab, God raised up Elijah to bear witness for His holy name against king and people ; but, when Ahab and Jezebel sought to take his life, he fled into the wilderness for safety. There he was at first wonderfully fed, and then in the strength of that food went forty days and forty nights in the wilderness without eating or drinking. At the end of that time God tried him, and talked with him, and at last sent him forth with a message for the kings.

So now He, for whom all the Law and Prophets had been preparing, He who came to fulfil what Moses and Elijah began, was prepared for His work after a like manner. He went forth from His own home, from the mother and brethren with whom He had lived, He left Nazareth and all the country where men dwelt, and took up His abode in the lonely wilderness with the wild beasts. Life with others was a necessary part of His learning: it was through that that He could enter into all their joys and sorrows. But life without others, at least a short space of such a life, was needful also, that He might be alone with His Father, and meditate undisturbed on the wonderful work which lay before Him. And that the discipline might be more complete, He followed Moses and Elijah in their fasting as well as in their loneliness. All those forty days and forty nights He also ate nothing. But, though He was beyond the reach of men and their sinful ways, He was not beyond the reach of temptation. We are so often led into sin by the example or persuasion or fear of others, that we dare to think the danger comes all from our daily intercourse with them. We fancy that, if we were set down each on a separate island alone with God, we should be all safe, and holiness would be an easy thing. A vain dream, as thousands have found. Ever since Christ came, aye, and in some countries long before He came, men have tried to put themselves out of harm's way by escaping from their fellows and shutting themselves up alone in wildernesses or within stone walls. Some good they may have

gained and done by their way of life, but assuredly not this; they have found that they could not escape themselves and the evil of their own hearts, and that no loneliness could keep out the devil and his snares. It is an awful thought that, when we seem to have most shut out everything which is not God, we are liable to the very deadliest and most dangerous assaults of the enemy. Christ had no evil of His own heart, but for all that He had the heart of a man, and therefore the devil could speak to it, and He could feel the bewitching power of the devil's voice, while He was refusing to obey it.

We learn from St. Luke that, as we might expect, the devil was striving to beguile Him all the forty days. But, as they drew to an end, and the time was coming for Christ to step forth into the world once more with renewed strength for doing His Father's work, the devil made three last powerful attempts to entangle the Holy One, whom he felt to be as yet untouched by his devices. These three dark whisperings were skilfully devised. They spoke straight home to the natural thoughts and feelings of One who knew that He was about to begin a great work, that He came forth from God to do it, and that God had given Him wonderful powers as His instruments. It will be enough for us to-day to consider a little the first of the three different temptations.

We read that after Jesus had fasted the forty days He was an hungred, and then the tempter came to Him and said, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." "If thou

be the Son of God"—in these words the devil sought probably to suggest doubts whether He could indeed bear that name. The one thing which from first to last we find ever present to our Lord's mind, the one thought which inspired all His acts and supported Him in all His sufferings, was the knowledge of His Father in heaven. Other servants and prophets of God had received wonderful help in distress: angels had ministered to their wants. He who called Himself the Son of God seemed alone to be unaided; could God indeed be His Father? Here was one temptation. Behind it there lay another. Supposing Christ could not be shaken in His belief in God as His Father, perhaps He might be led, so the devil thought, in order to prove that He was indeed God's Son, to do some act which would be a breach of God's will. In this snare there were more than one thread of cunning. You will remember how, when the serpent tempted Eve, he took advantage first of her bodily appetite, letting her see that the fruit of the tree of knowledge was good for food and pleasant to the eyes; but how along with that he mixed a far deeper temptation, in first putting into her heart distrust and almost dislike of God, and then leading her to the pleasure of disobedience, of doing that which was forbidden. This sin of pride and disobedience was just what caused his own fall, and this was what he strove to bring into the heart of man. It was much the same now in the wilderness. Christ's body must have been greatly enfeebled with His long fast, it must have had a craving for food; we are expressly told

that He was an hungred. Surely it would seem an innocent indulgence of the needs of the body to turn stones into bread. The power was there. Not long afterwards Christ turned water into wine, and multiplied the loaves and fishes. Yet more—such an act of power would show that He had indeed a right to call Himself Son of God; it would confound all doubt. Such were the thoughts that the devil's words were meant to stir up in Christ's heart.

And how does He answer them? Simply by quoting part of a verse from the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy. He says nothing about Himself as Son of God. Moses had said, "*Man* shall not live"; yet really the answer lay there. The devil wanted Him to set Himself above men, to glorify Himself, to show a wonderful power which they could not show, and to feed Himself in a way that they could not feed themselves. Little did he know what is meant by being a son of God, still less what was in the heart of *the* Son of God. Christ in all His discourses took just the opposite way. On the one hand His favourite name for Himself was the Son of Man; on the other, the purpose of all His words and deeds was to make all men know that they had a Father in heaven, that they had a right to call themselves sons of God. Therefore He wanted no honour or privilege all to Himself. It is written, "*Man* shall not live by bread alone," was law enough for Him. What was wrong for man was wrong for Him. His temptation was the same as theirs.

And again to have listened to the devil's tempting advice would have set Him wrong with God as well

as man. The purpose of Moses was to lead the Jews to look up to God for all the good things which they received, and to trust Him in all the hardships which they suffered. They were schooled by both the one and the other in the wilderness, lest at last in the fruitful land of promise they might pride themselves on their own prosperity and forget Him who gave it. They were inclined to think that they were nourished only by food; they forgot that all food receives its power of nourishing from God, and that everything which proceeds from Him is for the good and the life of man. Christ was tempted to the same sin. He was there in the wilderness by God's will, by the leading of the Spirit. To have turned stones into bread would have been as much as saying, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this food." It would have been using for His own needs what God had entrusted to Him for the benefit of others, and showing that He did not trust to God to keep Him alive with or without bread. This He refused to do, and so the devil was foiled for that time.

In all this, brethren, there is more that comes home to us than perhaps we think. We, too, are tempted to doubt that God is our Father. When we suffer pain or distress, nay, even when we feel the mere irksomeness of doing right, we are apt to think that He can be no Father who sets us in such straits. Yet we must not expect any miracles to startle us out of unbelief. God wrought none such on behalf of His only begotten, nor will He for us. We have the same assurance of Sonship in the spirit

which He has given us, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father." If we do not hear this, we shall be deaf to any proofs.

Or again some of us, who do believe ourselves to be sons of God, are inclined to keep that glory for ourselves, and fancy that the sinners whom we see around us cannot be sons of God too: perhaps we go so far as to think that we are permitted to do things forbidden to other men. Christ's example meets us here. If we set up ourselves above our fellows, if we trust in ourselves that we are righteous and despise others, we do just what Christ refused to do, we dishonour our sonship, we show but little of the Father's mind.

Once more, when the wants or the desires of the body press us strongly, we think we have a right to let them have their way, though it be by breaking God's law. We forget that no temptation has taken us or can take us but such as is common to man; and that God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it. The same resource is open to us as to Christ, steady trust in our Father, who has placed us where we are, and the strength of Christ, who, being tempted, prevailed over His enemy and ours, is given to those who cry to Him in the hour of their trial.

I said just now that Christ's victory over the devil in the wilderness was the beginning of that long line of victories which was complete when He rose from the dead, and trampled on him that hath the power

of death. He conquered sin, and then He conquered death. Let this be at once our comfort and our lesson, brethren, to-day, when the thought of death is brought so near to us. Since last Sunday three have passed away into the unseen world, one of them a leading member of our congregation, who long bore office among his brother churchmen. When the grave hides from our eyes those whom we have known and honoured, it is our privilege to believe that they are still in the keeping of the Lord of Life, Him over whom the Destroyer has been shown to have no power, and who never forsakes the work of His own hands. But for us, who survive, death can never lose its awfulness so long as sin and the knowledge of sin are still in the world. As St. Paul most truly says, "The sting of death is sin." If we would overcome death, we must begin by overcoming temptation. If we are not striving against the tempter now, it can only be because we have already given in to him, that is, accepted death for our portion. But if the tempter is ever near us, He who overcame the tempter is ever near us also, ready to help us to resist him, and to restore us when we have fallen. Our prayer then must ever be,

> "O keep us from the death of sin;
> So Thou, O Lord, shalt be
> The everlasting Easter joy
> Of all newborn in Thee."

"To him that overcometh," says the Spirit, "will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

VIII

THE TEMPTATION ON THE TEMPLE

"THEN the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."—*Matthew* iv. 5-7.

LAST Sunday I spoke to you about our Lord's temptation by the devil, and especially the first attempt made to shake His faith. It will be well to recall to mind the substance of what we then traced out, before going on to consider to-day the second temptation, and the way in which that too was resisted and overcome.

The temptation, we saw, followed close on our Lord's baptism. In that baptism He showed that nothing was unbecoming Him which any of His people had to go through. All those whose hearts answered to John the Baptist's stirring voice, who heard the call to repent, and came eager to find rid-

dance of the sins which clave to their souls, went down into the river Jordan, and were baptized by the preacher. Jesus had no sins of His own. But He had all the misery which came on other men through their sins. The thought of sin pressed heavily upon Him, and made Him suffer with them, nay, far more than they did. And so He came to share their baptism. He would not allow John's humble unwillingness to baptize Him, because it became Him to fulfil to the uttermost all righteousness which became them. But as He rose from the water, His Father in heaven bore witness to Him as His Son indeed, His beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased; and a dove lighted upon Him in token of the Holy Spirit of peace which rested upon Him without measure.

And now His work was to begin. That witness borne to Him from above was to fit Him for His Father's service, not to warrant His resting idly in the glory vouchsafed to Him. But first it must be tried whether He was indeed able for the task which lay before Him. For this cause, we are told, was the Son of God shown forth, that He might bring to nought the works of the devil. All His preachings, all His healings, were intended to set men free from some part or other of the curse which lay upon them through their subjection to the devil. It had then to be seen first, whether He were Himself proof against the devil, whether He could stand fast while the evil one put forth all his power and cunning to drag men deeper down to destruction by beguiling the very Captain of their Salvation. Straight from

the holy waters of Jordan and the Father's voice He came, led by the Holy Spirit itself, to face the unholy one. The very heavenliness of His faith was to be proved by its being able to meet and prevail against the powers of hell.

It was in the lonely wilderness that the struggle took place. Christ went there to prepare Himself for His ministry. As Moses had spent forty days without food on the bare rocks of Mount Sinai, before he was entrusted with the giving of God's law to Israel, as in a later day Elijah the prophet went forty days in the wilderness without food, before God spoke to him and sent him with messages to the kings, so Christ in like manner left His home and the dwellings of men and spent forty days without food in the wilderness. And there, alone as He was with God, without any distracting object to come between Him on earth and His Father in heaven, He found no freedom from the worst assaults of the evil one. For if our common life, the life which we pass among each other, be full of snares, a lonely life, shut out from those sins which our souls catch as it were from the infection of others, has other snares of its own. Nowhere can we escape our own thoughts, and the tempter who speaks to them.

After forty days of fasting our Lord's strength was reduced: we are told that He was an hungred. Through this natural craving of His body the devil thought to creep into His soul. "If thou be the Son of God," he said, "command that these stones be made bread." He wished perhaps to shake that which was the one constant stay of Christ's

hopes and endurance, the rest of a Son in a wise and loving Father. He was willing to insinuate that, if He were indeed the Son of Him who does not give His children stones for bread, He would not be left to starve in the desert. Or, if it were hopeless to think of beguiling Christ so far as that, at least he thought he might beguile Him into doing that which a son ought not to do, in order to prove that He was indeed a son.

What he suggested that Christ should do seemed simple and harmless enough. He possessed the power of changing one thing to another. Not long afterwards He changed water into wine, and increased the loaves and fishes beyond measure. No one would be injured by the taking of a stone from the wilderness. Why should He not put forth His hidden power, to satisfy the real and natural needs of His body, and at the same time show Himself to be the Son of God indeed by performing a work which no one less than that could perform?

But Christ's answer baffled him at all points. It showed no doubt of God being His Father, and yet He would work no marvel to prove that He was. He would not allow that God was not nourishing and supporting Him all the while, although He had no bread to eat, and could not turn stones into bread without sin. By obeying the tempter's voice He would have sinned both against man and against God.

His whole purpose in coming upon earth was to save man by taking his nature and his condition. As we saw just now, at His baptism He refused to stand aloof from the sinners who repented at John's bap-

tism. He was Himself, and delighted to call Himself, the Son of Man. He was for ever teaching men to believe that they too were God's children. But to have turned stones into bread as a proof of His Son ship would have been to lay stress on that in which He was *unlike* other men. It would have undone the very suffering which He was then undergoing for their sake, and made a hopeless difference between *His* temptation and any of their temptations.

Once more, Christ would have been sinning against God, both in using for His own wants the power which God had given Him for the use of men, and at the same time showing that He did not trust His Father to support Him in the trial on which, by the guiding of His Spirit, He had entered.

All this was given in His answer taken from the words of Moses, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The law which He confessed as that which must bind Him in all His doings was the law which God had laid down for *man*. If He had set up for being above the law given to man, He could not accomplish His work of salvation for man. And the warning given was this, that neither bread nor the labour by which the earth is made to provide bread are the true nourishers of life, but God Himself: and that He, the source of life, can maintain life in other ways, if so it pleases Him. Thus faith in Him is the right and true mind for man; and to distrust Him is the sin to which the devil strove to lead Christ Himself.

This then was the first temptation: and cunningly

as it was framed to ensnare our Lord from various sides at once, without shocking Him by advising any manifest crime, He laid bare its secret spring of hatred and unbelief, and overcame the evil one for Himself and for us. But Satan had other devices in store. He saw that Jesus would not keep Himself apart from His people whom He came to save. By this very care for their welfare he hoped next time to lead Him into sin. The true home of the Son of Man was not in the wilderness; it was among those whom He was not ashamed to call His brethren. And where among His brethren could a more fitting place be found for Him than in Jerusalem, the Holy City of Israel, still, after all their captivities and distresses, the sacred spot where the tribes went up to worship, the place which God Himself had chosen to put His name there? In the midst of the Holy City, rising out from among its houses, was the still holier temple of the Lord, the house where the Most High deigned to dwell. Since the devil now hoped to make Christ's love for His people into a way of temptation, he could not have chosen a better place for the attempt than the most sacred spot of Israel, around which crowds were daily passing to and fro.

Christ stood then on the high roof of the temple and looked down upon the city below. And if we think what He must have seen there, we shall see how yet more powerful would any temptation be which was meant to reach Him through His loving care. It was the Holy City, but what kind of men dwelt in it? They were giving themselves up to every vile kind of sin. It was the city built to be at

oneness with itself, the hearth of one people, worshippers of the One God. They were biting and devouring each other, tearing themselves into religious sects, disputing about the law and the various ways of holiness, each man eager to clutch at any excuse for hating and despising his neighbour. Above all, He must have seen tokens of the very worst idolatry in the temple, in the city, and in all the doings of its inhabitants; even that idolatry which is also called covetousness and the love of money. In their love of gain they had turned the Father's house into a den of thieves, and that was only because out of the temple they thought of nothing so much as getting on, and money was to them the true almighty one power, to which they paid homage and service morning noon and night.

These were the sights and thoughts that must have risen up before the Saviour as He stood on the temple's roof, when the tempter whispered in His ear, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Once more the devil threw doubts on His being the Son of God, or urged Him to prove it by an act which would in fact belie the truth itself. Once he had tried to betray Christ by leading Him to work a wonder for His own benefit, to supply His own wants by turning stones into bread. That attempt had utterly failed. Even, as it seemed, so slight and pardonable a trace of selfishness as that was nowhere to be found in the Holy One. Now

he tried the opposite way, the way of giving up self, but giving it up in an unlawful manner. He advised Him to throw Himself down from the temple into the court or city below before all the people, that the marvellous sight of a man leaping from such a height, and yet receiving no hurt, might startle their dull hearts, and turn them to listen to Him in whom so great a power was given by God to dwell. We have seen already that from the experience of the first temptation the devil had learnt to assail Christ through His care for the people. Let us notice also how he learned to use Scripture as a weapon of his own, even as Scripture had been the means by which he was first defeated. The snare was well and wisely chosen ; but the devil's wisdom cannot stand before the simple life of holy trust.

Jesus said unto him, " It is written again, ' Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' " Once more He will not stand alone, but throws in His lot with His people, and confesses Himself bound by their duties. The children of Israel in the wilderness were often forgetting God their Saviour, murmuring when any want of food came upon them, doubting the truth of God's presence and care—as the Bible says, tempting or trying God and His patience. All the sins they committed came from this root, that they did not feel they were in God's hands, to do His work and will and not their own. Christ owned no higher rule for Himself. He too dared not tempt the Lord His God. He knew that God had not called Him to throw Himself down from the temple. That short and sudden way of producing

an effect might minister to His own pride, but it would not be God's way. A humbler and quieter and more truly painful task lay before Him for days and months to come. Because He really trusted in God, He could trust in God's ways of converting His people, no less than in God's willingness and power to keep Him from harm. The act which the devil proposed to Him would have been after all a glorifying of Himself in His own heart, a leading of men to worship Him more than His Father. His trust was one that we all can practise, though we dare not believe that God will break His own laws to save us from harm when we rush upon our own destruction.

This second temptation may not seem at first sight to yield so much instruction for ourselves, brethren, as the first, and yet we need it too. It is a great thing to have resisted some strong impulse to seek our own pleasure or welfare alone. But, after that, we are very apt to think that our task is over, and we may yield ourselves up without further thought to ourselves, trusting the good feeling which has thus far prevailed. But no, says the Bible, "Be not highminded, but fear." It is madness to trust to anything in ourselves. The just man lives only by faith, by a constant steady looking up to God at every step for guidance as to the right way, and strength to walk in it. Do not let us dream of gaining some extra credit by cutting out for ourselves a new way of doing good: this is only disguised pride, and want of trust in God and His ways. The grace of God must come to us in vain, if we do not

live in the belief that we are workers together with Him, and that all work that is not done with Him is rotten from the very beginning, and doomed to perish. When we want to go our own way, it is easy to find good excuses, easy to quote texts out of the Bible to soothe our uneasy consciences. We forget that the Bible is so precious for our use because it is the word of God, and that we make it not His but our own word when we quote it against His known mind and will. Lastly, it is true now as ever that God does give His angels charge to keep His people in all their ways: He does still deliver those who set their love on Him. But He works no miracles to keep us from the common lot of man, suffering and death. It is His will that we should pass through them: they are His instruments for our highest salvation. Our Elder Brother has gone before us through the same. He would not ask for angels to keep Him from bodily hurt. He drank willingly, and His Father willingly suffered Him to drink, the full cup of human misery, and through His death He opened to us the gate of everlasting life.

IX

THE TEMPTATION ON THE MOUNTAIN

"AGAIN, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them: and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him."—*Matthew* iv. 8-11.

SINCE the beginning of Lent we have been considering the temptations which our Lord had to endure at the opening of His ministry. We have seen how the tempter endeavoured to shake His belief in His being the son of God, or at least to induce Him to prove it by doing what a true son of God would not do, that is, by turning stones into bread to supply His own bodily needs. But Christ, the Son of Man, would neither separate Himself from men, His brethren, nor distrust His Father's power and will to support Him in any way that seemed to Him best; He applied to Himself the words, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out

of the mouth of God." Again, we have seen how the enemy, finding Christ firmly resolved not to be led astray by His own wants, endeavoured a second time to beguile Him through His very love for His people; how he tried to persuade Him to cast Himself down from the temple before them all, that the sight of one marvellously kept from death by the power of God might startle their dull hearts into obedience. But once more Christ would suffer neither a text of Scripture nor His own desire for the welfare of His people to betray Him into seeking their welfare in a way undutiful to His Father in heaven. He rested once more on a commandment given of old to them. He refused to break it by tempting the Lord His God.

Now then we come to the third temptation, which is our proper subject for to-day. The tempter had tried to make Christ work a wonder for His own relief, and he had failed in that. He had tried to make Him work a wonder of risk to Himself for the sake of His people, and he had failed in that too. But he had one device still left, a device which would seem to ask almost nothing from Christ, while it held out the most tempting of bribes to one who was ordained to be a Prince and a Saviour. Christ now stood on the top of a high mountain, and looked out far and wide over the earth and its various kingdoms. When the devil had let Him gaze well on the distant sight, he said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

To understand this offer, we must think a little of what hopes rightly belonged to Christ. The Jews

had learnt by slow degrees that God their Lord was the Lord of the whole earth, and not of their own land only. With that they learned to believe also that their king should have other kingdoms of the world subject to Him. David, in his last prayer and prophecy for his son who should sit upon his throne, had declared his dominion should be from the one sea to the other, and from the river unto the ends of the earth, that all kings should fall down before him, and all nations do him service. Solomon had fulfilled these glorious promises in part, but only in part. The words seemed still to crave to be more truly fulfilled. In due time the prophet Daniel had a strange vision, how "one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him."

Such were the promises to which our Lord was heir. The glory of His people Israel, He was also set for a light to lighten the Gentiles. The kingdoms of the world and the glory of them belonged of right to Himself, and this He knew. But there they lay in all their power and greatness, and how was He, a poor Galilean, to claim them for His own? All their wealth and pride could have few charms for Him. But there must have been enough which met His eye, as He looked forth from the mountain top, to make Him feel how happy a thing it would be to have those kingdoms and their glory altogether in His own hands, His own saving and healing hands. The sight of pitiless tyrants set over half the world, of wild soldiers trampling defenceless people, of laws

broken and despised without any redress, might well suggest the thought how blessed a thing it would be to rule these nations Himself with full mercy and justice in God's name, and render to God all the glory.

To such thoughts as these the devil boldly spoke: "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." All the wretchedness and misgovernment and wickedness which Christ saw in the kingdoms of the world came from the devil. The devil's power there was sadly unmistakeable. He did not seem to be very far wrong in speaking of the kingdoms as his own. By giving them to Christ he would be yielding up all his power of sin and torment, and suffering Christ to bless the earth as He pleased without hindrance.

And now, what was it that he asked in return? That Christ would fall down and worship him. But how much lay in that! It would have been acknowledging the devil as the true king of the nations. Above all, it would have been rendering to him the duty and worship owed to God alone.

For see Christ's answer. As before, He takes refuge in a command of Scripture spoken to other men, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." The devil did not ask Christ not to serve God, but only to serve himself too. He did not dare openly to scoff at Christ's high hopes and plans for the salvation of the world, but he wanted Him to accept from himself the means of carrying out His plans. But vain, hopelessly vain, was the attempt. Christ would suffer no further

parley with him. He bade him begone. That last temptation had stirred up all His powers of resistance, and He could send the tempter away more vigorously than ever. He would not attempt to serve two masters. To begin by serving the devil in order to help God's cause would have been giving up everything. If He had given place to the devil ever so little, His whole work would have been ruined. God would, He knew, in His own time suffer Him to take full possession of His kingdom: He trusted Him entirely: He would tarry His leisure.

Perhaps, brethren, you wonder at this being spoken of as a real temptation to our Lord, still more, His last and worst temptation. You find it hard to imagine how any one could be brought even to think of falling down and worshipping the devil. Unhappily it is what we are all practising every day: only that he hides his devices so skilfully that we forget what we are really doing. In very truth there are few things that we are so much afraid of as worshipping the Lord our God, and serving Him alone. Often and often the devil points out to us how many things there are in the world which we should be so happy if we could possess. He persuades us that we must, as the saying is, take the world as we find it, and not strive after an unprofitable height of goodness: we see how often the honest are cheated, and the weak go to the wall; and we ask what is the use of trying to be better than our neighbours. So we not only put up with evil in others, but pride ourselves on our own wisdom and knowledge of the world in not being too

particular. Yet this is in the grossest way saying that we believe the devil to be the real master of this life, and that, as we want to get on, we mean at all events to serve him first, and let God take His chance afterwards, if we find it convenient.

Again, there are some of us who would not wilfully and knowingly choose the devil's service for their own sake, but are only too ready to do what our Lord was especially tempted to do, that is, try to carry out good objects in bad ways. They think they are all right because their wish is to do good, and they deceive themselves into thinking they need not be too particular as to the means. This is what is called doing evil that good may come. The story of our Lord's temptation teaches us that the best name for it is falling down and worshipping the devil by way of helping God. It comes at last from want of thorough trust in God, from not following first His plain commands and then leaving all the consequences to Him. The words, "God's will be done," are often on our lips; but oh! it is seldom indeed that we say with all our hearts as an earnest desire and prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and the reason is because we do not mean anything when we say, "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory."

Perhaps, brethren, some few among us, at least, when they hear this warning, will be encouraged to act upon it by what happened after that last temptation. "Then," says St. Matthew, "the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him." We know indeed that the struggle had not

ceased for ever: the departure was but for a season: Christ had other temptations to pass through before His course was done. But still a great victory was gained: it was a losing game that the devil had to play from that day. God, who suffered His Holy One to pass through that terrible hour, sent His ministering angels to soothe and refresh His weary spirit when all was over. There was heaven, joyful and peaceful heaven, within, as soon as the evil one was put to flight.

This then, brethren, is the story of our Lord's temptation. These are the lessons which it reads us year by year when Lent returns and brings back to our thoughts those forty days in the wilderness. Now let us think what it has to say to us at this moment, on this last Sunday before the Confirmation.

I am not speaking only to those who are themselves about to be confirmed. I am speaking to all. With many of you years and years have passed since you were confirmed: perhaps your present feeling is that you have got all that over long ago, and that you have nothing more to do with it now. If so, none have greater need than you to be reminded of that almost forgotten day. The promises you made then were made for life. The gift of God's Spirit bestowed on you then was bestowed for life. If you find your present life unsatisfying, hopeless, weary, consider whether part at least of the reason may not be that you have thrown away the medicine for these ills which the recollection of your Confirmation might have supplied to you. Be thankful then now that it is brought freshly to your mind, and seize the

opportunity for beginning once more the way of peace which you have long forsaken.

To those among you who have children of your own now about to be confirmed this present time speaks with still greater force. It rests with you, more perhaps than you think, whether this is indeed a turning point in their lives for good, whether they will now henceforth walk in the love and fear of God. Let me strongly urge as many of you as can to go to Hitchin church on Friday next and take part yourselves in that solemn service. But still more needful is it that at home you encourage them in all good and serious thoughts and ways belonging to the time, and support them against the laughter of foolish and worthless friends. Above all, lift up your hearts in prayers to God that they may indeed lead the rest of their lives according to this beginning and that you and they may be enabled by His grace to help and strengthen each other in His service.

But the message is most of all sent to you who propose to come forward in your own names this week. During the last few weeks I have been bringing before you privately the chief lessons as to the step which you are about to take yourselves and the blessings which you are about to receive from on high. To-day I would dwell only on what our Lord's temptation specially teaches. You stand, as He did then, at the threshold of life. Those temptations came upon Him as He was about to go forth into the world to do His Father's work. The perfect victory over evil which He gained then stood Him in good stead in the days that followed. A

holy and blameless childhood did not save Him from having to battle with the evil one when manhood came: new powers brought new dangers. But when that great victory was once gained, the worst was over.

And so, I do not shrink from saying, it may be with you now, though in a less degree. Confirmation stands to you as a sign of the choice for good or evil which you have to make now in opening manhood or womanhood. The struggle will not indeed be over in one day. It may last in a manner for years. Nay, at different times in your life it may have to be renewed: no day of your life will pass without some call upon you to stand fast in God's name against the enemy. But much will depend on the heart and spirit in which you meet the service of Friday next. If you go to it carelessly and thoughtlessly, you do worse than lose what you might have gained: you give the enemy the advantage of a profaned and dishonoured ordinance. If, on the other hand, you meet it with eager and longing hearts, wholly distrusting yourselves, throwing yourselves on your Maker and your Redeemer, you will have taken the one great step which will make all others easier; you will find in yourselves an unlooked for power to stand against temptation when temptation comes. And if you feel the blessed memory of that day fading out of your minds, you can renew yet better and mightier memories in the Communion Feast of the Lord your Saviour, the everlasting help of them that are tempted, and find there the hope and peace which, as the hymn says, ever flow from His presence.

But Christ's temptation has other lessons for you still. "If thou be the Son of God" was the weapon of doubt with which the evil one twice assailed His faith. Believe me, it is his most dangerous weapon still. If he can keep you from learning to know that you are indeed children of the Lord of heaven and earth, that all His dealings with you are those of a Father with rebellious, but always deeply-loved children; or if, after you have become persuaded of this blessed truth, he can succeed in undermining your belief and dropping into your hearts instead black falsehoods about your Heavenly Father, his work is half done: whatever you had of religion is gone; it will be strange indeed if you can make much fight without it. As years go on, and fresh dangers throng round you: when the unruly passions of your bodies entice you to gluttony or drunkenness or uncleanness or sloth, when the false and ungodly opinion of your friends and neighbours makes you shrink from following the voice of your own conscience, when falsehood and selfwill and covetousness and hatred are thrusting themselves into your hearts, and striving to set you one against another, what will you have to lean on for help against all these tempters, if you have given up your God? And you do give Him up when you do not cleave to Him by constant prayer and praise and loving devotion to His service.

Accept Him then this week boldly and hopefully as your own. You cannot depart out of His presence or escape the reach of His hand. Thank Him that you cannot, for to be shut off from Him would be

the most dreadful of deaths. You have been taught to know Him as He is—as the Father who made you, the Son who died to ransom you from sin and death, the Holy Ghost who makes you strong and holy, and knits you and all His Church together in one happy fellowship. Rejoice then in this His holy name; let the hearts of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore.

Confirmation must always have Lenten thoughts belonging to it. It can never be separated from the recollection and the dread of temptation: it speaks of sins to be repented and enemies to be renounced. But Lent itself is heathenish and not Christian, if it leads us for one moment to forget the coming Easter, if it drowns the hope of life in the fear of death. Much more should Confirmation, with all its solemnity, be a time of faith and hope.

Listen to and join in the words of the psalm, which were spoken before the Son of God had died and risen again, but which ring forth with new power to us who are bred up in the faith of that blessed gospel: "When I called upon thee, thou heardest me and enduedst my soul with much strength. They shall sing in the ways of the Lord that great is the glory of the Lord. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, yet shalt thou refresh me: thou shalt stretch forth thy hand upon the furiousness of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. The Lord shall make good his loving-kindness toward me: yea, thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: despise not then the works of thine own hands."

X

GOD'S LOVE SHOWN IN CHRIST'S DEATH

"God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."—*Romans* v. 8.

Good Friday must always be in some measure a day of mixed and contradictory thoughts for those to whom it brings any thoughts about its meaning. We cannot separate it from our greatest blessing, our redemption from the power of sin and evil. We may be very careless about the matter: the thought of it may do us very little good. Still in one way or another we all of us believe that Christ is our Saviour, and that that name comes to Him first and foremost from His death on the cross, which we celebrate to-day.

And yet who is there that does not feel a kind of weight and discomfort upon him to-day? The tale of our Lord's sufferings is so awful in itself, the salvation bought for us is so great and wonderful, that, if we think of them at all, we long to raise our minds to a pitch in some degree suited to them.

Sometimes we strain hard to become unusually solemn or unusually thankful, and sometimes, feeling how difficult that is, we give up the attempt, and rest in a half-sullen and unprofitable gloom, and long for the day to be over.

And if it is thus hard to think and feel rightly about to-day, how much harder is it to speak rightly about it! There is some escape for each of us privately in simply reading the story told in the Gospels. But it is another thing to try to guide the thoughts of a congregation aright: then the seemly and, it may be, blessed silence has to be broken, even though the words spoken will assuredly be unworthy of the great subject, but tinged with some of that very disorder of mind which they are meant to destroy.

First of all, I would say that Good Friday is not and ought not to be mainly a day of rejoicing. It would be a sadly selfish and unnatural kind of Christianity that could lead any one to make it such. The Bible does not teach us to love our own safety, but it does teach us to love our Heavenly Father and His dear Son Jesus Christ. Surely if we love Christ really and truly, not in some shadowy and unmeaning way, but in the way in which we love those who are dear to us on earth, we can only feel bitter pain and grief when we think of His cruel sufferings and death.

There is, I am sure, no one here who has not either read or heard various stories of people in other countries or in other times who have had to suffer great dangers and pains, and at last death: and

every one who has heard such stories must have, at least for the moment, been made grave and sad by what he heard. It is not natural to hear such things without being sorry for them: and yet the people who endured them had perhaps nothing to do with us beyond being men like ourselves: they were no friends or relations of ours: probably we had never heard of them before. In many cases the stories never pretended to do more than tell us what might have happened, and the people in them never existed. Still we could not help being sorry for them. Shall we then have no sorrow or sadness for our own Lord's sufferings and death? That surely would be unnatural indeed.

Again, there is a still stronger reason why we should grieve to-day. Not only was Christ a sufferer; not only was He no stranger, but One whom we profess to love: He was also suffering *for our sakes.* He had no object of His own to gain by all that He underwent on earth: it was for our sakes, and only for our sakes, that He bore so much: our sin had cut us off from God and from the blessedness which can be found only in the life of God; and there was but one way by which we could be brought back within reach of the happy state which we had lost: and that way was by His becoming like one of ourselves, suffering like the most suffering of us, and dying like us: and He never flinched from going through it all for us. Ought not our sorrow at His cross and passion to be yet more sorrowful for the thought that it was all endured for our sakes?

And when we go on to remember how little there

is in us to make Him show such wonderful love to us, we are led further still. It is sad to see any one bearing trouble for us whom we know that we love, and have always loved, not so much indeed as we could wish, but still truly and unmistakeably. But how much sadder when we know that we have hardly loved Him at all, but grieved and provoked Him all our life long, and yet not estranged Him from us, so that He has been willing to sacrifice Himself for our sakes as freely as if we had the fullest right to expect it! This thought must add the last drop of bitterness to the sorrow which ought to fill our hearts on the day of our Lord's crucifixion, if we really love Him. But, as I said before, everything depends on that. If we are only thinking about our own poor selves, we shall have no room for Him. There cannot be a better sign of the depth and truth of our love to Him than this, that we grieve for Him as we grieve for those dearer to us than our very selves: and, if there are none dearer to us than our very selves, it is, I fear, in most cases a sign that we hardly care for Christ at all.

I have been trying to show you that the first and most natural of all the thoughts fitted for Good Friday are those of deep and sincere love and sorrow for Him who as on this day died on the cross for us. But, though these are the first and most natural thoughts, it is not safe to be taken up altogether with that sad picture of suffering and death. The wise and touching collect for last Sunday, which in a manner carries us at once through all the thoughts belonging to this week, even to Easter Day, does not

speak first of Jesus Christ, but of the Father: "Almighty and Everlasting God, who, of Thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent Thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon Him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross." We must, therefore, let the sufferings of Christ lead us in thought up to Him who sent Him to suffer. We must not dare for a moment to think or speak as if both did not love us alike. This is no fancied danger: we often do it, without seeing how wrong it is. Forgetting such passages as the text which says that God commendeth *His* love, His own love, toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, we make for ourselves a gospel which is not Christ's gospel, and fly from God as if He were the enemy from whom His Son delivers us. This is indeed, I fear, one reason why the cross of Christ has so little power over the lives of many of us who can talk smoothly about salvation: it hides from us what salvation really is, even perfect likeness to Christ Himself.

Evil fancies like these, if natural at any time, are natural to-day; for to-day brings us face to face with the crowning and most affecting of all Christ's actual doings for us. And yet this is the day which better than any other may help to purge our minds from any unwillingness to honour the Father, even as we are minded to honour the Son. If once we can get firmly fixed in our hearts the belief that, through all the shame and anguish of Calvary, the Father was of one mind with the Son, it will be scarcely possible to put them asunder at other times and in the midst of other thoughts. Let us give good heed to those

weighty words from the Epistle to the Hebrews, which occur in the epistle for to-day. "Wherefore when he," that is, Christ, "cometh into the world, he saith, 'Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.' Above when he said, 'Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein, which are offered by the law,' then said he, 'Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.'" Thus God, who could have no pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices of cattle, was perfectly well pleased when His dearly beloved Son, having been made man, came as man to do His will even unto death. It was through Christ's perfect likeness to the Father, not through any unlikeness, that He became the Author of our salvation.

Let us then be sure, brethren, that we do not really love Christ for His own sake, if we do not love His and our Father also. Let us be sure that any sorrow and pity that we may feel at His cross and passion is a mawkish and empty thing, if it does not lift up our hearts high above Calvary itself to the throne of heaven, and the gracious God seated upon it, into whose hands the Son of Man commended His spirit in the moment of death.

But there is a barrenness which belongs too often to all our sorrow at Christ's sufferings. Is not our grief, when we are grieved at all, too much a grief for an event long past and gone, with which we have

had nothing to do, which we could not prevent, and which we cannot now remove? Is not our anger against the Jews and Romans too plainly mixed with a comfortable pride that *we* never have crucified our Lord, and that, if He were now on earth, we would not suffer such things to be done? This too is a natural thought; but God will not let us rest quietly in it. The Bible has some very severe and startling words about crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting Him to an open shame. No, the crucifixion is not past and done with yet, so long as there is sin in the world. We cannot be in the way to enter into the inheritance which it has opened to us, so long as we fancy ourselves guiltless of that innocent blood. This is no trick or fancy of doctrine. It is the simplest, nakedest truth. We *are* guilty of that innocent blood. Our sins were part of the burden which bowed down the spotless Saviour's soul. Our sins, the sins of every one of you and mine, were part of the curse from which we and all mankind have been delivered by that cruel death. Every time we break the Father's holy laws we are making ourselves more guilty of that unutterable crime. Every year has its Good Friday to tell us that we are: but, thanks be to God, to tell us also that He whom we have pierced has forgiven us, and that He bids us go bravely on where He has gone before, knowing that in the might of His cross we can tread down His and our only enemy, for He being lifted up on that cross is drawing all men to Him.

XI

THE LIVELY HOPE PROCEEDING FROM THE RESURRECTION

"BLESSED be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."—1 *Peter* i. 3.

THERE is something strange to our ears in the present day both in what these words say, and in the joyful fearless tone in which they say it. We have all been born and bred in the faith that Jesus Christ, who was crucified on Calvary, rose from the dead on the third day. We have also been born and bred in the faith that, when our bodies are shut up in a coffin and buried in a grave in the churchyard, that is not the end of us; but that we shall rise again to a future life. Once more, we have been born and bred in the faith that Christ's rising from the dead at Jerusalem more than eighteen hundred years ago is in some way an assurance of our rising from the dead, and that therefore our hopes of a future life are naturally brought to mind by Easter Day more than

by any other day of the year. All this we take rather as a matter of course. But it does not seem to bring us much nearer to St. Peter's state of mind. We are willing perhaps to allow that thanks are due to God for not leaving us to perish utterly with the decay of our present bodies like sheep or cattle; but we find it hard to join quite honestly in so warmly blessing the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for it. We scarcely think of it as mercy, much less as abundant mercy. We should hardly of our own accord call our own feeling a lively or living hope. Above all, we cannot enter into that very peculiar saying of St. Peter, that God *has begotten us again* to a lively hope by His Son's resurrection. It is not hard to understand how our rising from the dead to a better life might be truly called a second birth; and in that case God who will raise us from the dead might well be spoken of as begetting us again. But this is not what St. Peter says. The new life for which he blesses God is something given to us already: and its great mark is that it is a life of glowing hope.

Now it is certainly not likely that we shall, in any case, attain to the full measure of faith and joyfulness which filled the blessed apostle St. Peter, himself a companion of Christ and an eye-witness of most of the wonderful works which Christ wrought on earth for his and our salvation. But, believe me, brethren, it must be sad and wrong that St. Peter's words should find so very poor an answer in our hearts, and that we should not be able to understand at least a little of what he felt by the help of what we are able

to feel within ourselves. Let us then try whether we can learn in some degree how he, who began by being a rough and ignorant fisherman, came into such a state, that the language of my text was what came naturally to his pen when he began to write to his fellow Christians.

In the very first days of our Lord's ministry he had been brought by his brother Andrew to see and own Him as the Messiah or Anointed One, whose coming the Jews were expecting. A little later he had obeyed Christ's call, and left his fishing boat to follow Him. He had gone about with his Holy Master for many months, understanding Him better and better, and yet expecting Him soon to throw off that life of humility and dazzle the world with royal power and glory. When Christ had put a stop to that foolish dream of the disciples, he still followed Him faithfully till the last night before the crucifixion, when in hateful cowardice he denied that he had ever known Him. Next day he must have seen the death on the cross and the writing set over it, which mockingly called on him to believe, if he could, that that dying prisoner was the King of the Jews. How could his hopes, either for himself or his people, outlive that day? The saying of Cleopas exactly expresses what he must have felt: "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." It was no longer a question of sitting on Christ's right hand or His left in His kingdom. That dream Christ had long ago scattered. But he had the heart of an Israelite; and his hope of better days for Israel rested on the surest ground,

the old promises of God. And now God's promises seemed to be broken. God's Anointed had been persecuted even to death by the priests and rulers of his own countrymen: the people of the Jews had rebelled against the King of the Jews, and handed Him over to their hated foreign masters, the Romans, to be put to death.

When then St. Peter at last knew that the Lord had indeed risen from the dead, the tidings had a meaning for him through which we may begin to understand the text. Everything that could possibly fall upon the Redeemer of Israel had fallen upon Him. Pharisees and Sadducees, priests and people, Jews and Romans, death and the devil, had all done their worst upon Him. He had yielded to them all, and then risen above them all. Death, which seemed always at last to swallow up even the best and mightiest of earthly things, had been shown to have no real power over Him. What end could there be to the reign of Him whom the Father had made to conquer death, the conqueror of kings and armies and peoples and every earthly might? Henceforward St. Peter could wait in patient faith Christ's own time for bringing to perfection the redemption of Israel. It might come to pass soon or late, in his own life-time or when his weary body should have been laid in the grave. What did that matter? It must come to pass at last, for Jesus of Nazareth, his Lord and his God, was King for ever and ever.

Will not these recollections of St. Peter's past life help to explain how the thought of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was able to draw forth

from him such a burst of praise? Surely they make his words as fitting as any we can imagine. Surely the life that began for him, when he found that Christ was indeed risen from the dead, was like more than a second life, and that Easter morning was the morning of a new birth. For, though he still trod the streets of Jerusalem as before, and met there the same faces, and fished in the same lake of Gennesaret at his old home in Galilee, everything must have presented to him an entirely new look now that the spell of death was taken off, and He whom he knew so well had all power given unto Him in heaven and earth. We are not left to fancy in trying to picture to ourselves the change which passed upon St. Peter. We have only to read the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, and there we shall see plainly in his speeches, and still more in his doings, what a new man it was that had taken the place of the old Simon Peter, and how God had indeed begotten him again by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Nor was his state less truly described by the other words, "unto a lively hope." Just think what it was that Christ's resurrection had outwardly brought to Peter. It was not merely that his first dreams of earthly power had been rudely scattered and not restored: he might then still have been no worse off than before: he might perhaps have gone on as he had ever done, before St. Andrew told him that he had found the Messias. But Christ's resurrection told him that the former assurance, that henceforth he should catch men instead of fish, was still meant

to be carried out. He was one of those whom Christ sent forth to preach the gospel to every creature. He received a special command to feed Christ's sheep. And thus the resurrection brought to him a life of toil and danger and persecution which did not cease till, like his Master, he too died on the cross. The new birth which came to him was not to comfort and rest; but it was in every sense to a hope, and a living hope, one so overpowering as to drive out all care about comfort or rest. He was ever looking forward to the fuller and fuller unveiling of his Master's kingdom. The redemption already accomplished was bearing its fruit even now in the world, and he was eagerly and joyfully expecting and welcoming the advancing knowledge of the Lord.

But this hope was not in any sense a dead hope left helpless and unsupported in his mind, without power to stir his own life. It was a hope fed daily and hourly from within by the power and presence of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, and from without by the growing fulfilment which God was ever granting and making plain to His chosen servant. It was the mainspring of all his thoughts and all his doings. It lifted him above everything that was befalling himself or his people, the Jews or the Church Universal, or the whole race of mankind; in every evil chance which befel him or them it gave forth something of the virtue of the resurrection itself, turning labour and sorrow and death into instruments of their own destruction.

But supposing that the text was true and right

language for St. Peter to use, does it follow that it can have anything like the same meaning for us? Our times are not like his; we have passed through no such changes in our own life, and have never been companions of the Son of God walking upon earth. Are then his words profitable for us to study, not as matters of curiosity about an apostle who died long ago, but as guides to such thoughts as it is reasonable and right for ourselves to cherish? Yes, brethren, I am sure that all the difference between us and St. Peter does not render the text unfit for our own use.

It is no doubt true that quiet times and many other things in the course of the world have made all high thoughts pale and dim. We are cumbered and taken up with the little things close at hand, and almost forget the great. We do not think much about life. We do not think much about death. How then can we think much about resurrection, and the new birth and living hopes? The resurrection of Christ can never come with much power, except where it comes as the answer to a question already being asked, or rather a whole body of questions. But, if we interest ourselves so little in the matter that we have no desire to ask the questions, and do not think it of much consequence how they are answered, or whether they are answered at all, the answer can be no answer to us, that is, it is almost nothing to us. The first thing is to be roused anyhow out of our drowsiness, and then we shall know what St. Peter meant. Yet even at once we may find help in his thanksgiving, so far as our

drowsiness comes from a melancholy suspicion that all things alike come hopelessly to an end.

Yet surely we may begin at once to make St. Peter's experience our own. There can be few here who have never known what it is to hope. The things hoped for may have been worthless enough, but the spirit was there, and it was a life-giving spirit. Then of course came disappointment; and so in most cases hope is gone, and we trudge on our way without it. So it is, and so it must be, with all who have not an unusually happy character, till the living hope is found in the Lord's resurrection. But to find that, we must first know ourselves in our own sin and misery, and then know Him in His condescension to our sin and misery; then we shall be assured that in rising from sin and hell He raises us up with Himself, and that great hope shows itself to be a living hope by kindling a thousand lesser hopes around it, and the dull shadows are lighted with sunshine, and we know that a new life has begun for us, and that God is the Author of it.

Such then is the message of Easter to all those whose most usual state is now one of listless unrest. It may in some cases be lightened though hardly removed by the thought of a better world to come. To those whose minds thus ever turn to a future resurrection I would not say a word of discouragement: their hope does properly belong to Easter, though I have hardly spoken of it to-day. But to them and to all St. Peter's words have in them another voice which ought to be of yet greater power. The lively hope to which God has begotten

us by His Son's resurrection brings heaven near to earth to-day and always, in the weary and too familiar present no less than in the unseen future. It shows us our risen Lord dwelling and ruling among us in our daily work and rest, though we may forget His presence. The vision departs from us when we cease to pray, and when we go our own ways and live as though God Himself were dead, and dead for ever. The thankless or pleasure-loving heart cannot know what it is to have a hope that can be called a living hope. And yet that comfort is always near at hand, ready to cheer even the most downcast spirit. Taking hold of our risen Lord, we need never despair when any good thing seems to die. Its resurrection may be nearer than we think : at all events it will come in God's own time ; for the Lord of life has had all things given into His power, and the grave cannot hold them when His voice bids them come forth.

XII

ANDREW'S DISCOVERY OF THE CHRIST TO HIMSELF AND PETER

"ONE of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ; and he brought him to Jesus."—*S. John* i. 40-42.

TO-DAY, brethren, we begin a new year in the services of the Church. We have come to the end of the Collects, Epistles, and Gospels in the Prayer-book and of the corresponding lessons, and now we begin the order afresh. The mixed and varied instruction on the general duties of a Christian life to which you have been listening for more than five months is now put aside for a while, and you are asked to fix your thoughts once more with special intentness on the person and work of Jesus Christ our Saviour. In less than a month we shall be celebrating His birth as a child as on Christmas Day, and this preparatory season of Advent is meant to lead us to look forward in various ways to His actual coming.

Such a day, a First Sunday in Advent, occurs every year. This year, however, we make a double beginning of the new course of days to be remembered by all Christian people. This year Advent Sunday falls on St. Andrew's day, and the first of our Sunday services is mixed with the first celebration of the apostles and other holy men. It may be only by accident that St. Andrew's name is thus the first that meets us in the list of Christ's faithful servants. But, accidental or not, we shall, I think, find a special fitness in the place which he thus holds in our services.

The Gospel for to-day relates a well-known event in the Gospel history. "Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers: and he saith unto them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' And they straightway left their nets and followed him." On this story the Collect for the day is founded. We pray God, who gave such grace to His holy apostle St. Andrew, that he readily obeyed the call of Jesus Christ, and followed him without delay,—to grant that we, being called by His holy word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil His holy commandments. In the narrative St. Peter and St. Andrew are mentioned side by side without distinction. St. Peter's name occurs first, and his after life and doings were so much more famous, that we almost think of him alone when we read the account in St. Matthew.

It is not quite the same with the beautiful story

told by St. John in which my text occurs, and which I wish you particularly to think about this morning. There, at first at least, St. Andrew's is the leading name, and we are told at least one fact about him which refers to him alone. The two stories are however not unconnected, and it is very interesting to see the light which each throws on the other. If we had only St. Matthew's Gospel to guide us, we might suppose that when Jesus called St. Peter and St. Andrew as they were fishing in the Sea of Galilee, and they at once followed Him, we might suppose I say, that this was the first time they had ever seen Jesus, and that it was only by a sudden impulse that they left the business of their lives to go about with Him in His journeys. St. John's Gospel shows however that it was not so. He brings before us an earlier scene, not in Galilee, the apostles' own home and the place where they plied their trade, but by the bank of the river Jordan, where John the Baptist was baptizing. We thus see that that sudden obedience to Christ's call in Galilee was in fact the fruit of their earlier acquaintance with Him: and surely it must be most useful and most interesting to us to study all we are told about that first meeting, the recollection of which could lead two poor fishermen to so marvellous an obedience.

The first person who appears before us in St. John's account is his namesake, St. John the Baptist, he who came to prepare the way for the greater Son of God. His preaching in the wilderness had led many to repentance. Multitudes flocked to him

from far and near, from crowded cities and lonely villages. Rich and poor, great and small, learned and ignorant, were eager to hear the burning words in which he proclaimed the approaching kingdom of heaven, and besought all men to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. Among the rest who clung to him as a teacher come from God, and lingered near him for the sake of his lessons of holiness, were two disciples. One we are told was Andrew; the name of the other is not given, but there can be little doubt that it was John himself, afterwards known as the disciple whom Jesus loved. These two were with John the Baptist one day when they saw Jesus walking near them. This was not the first time that the Baptist had met Jesus. He had beheld with wonder and awe the heavenly life which Jesus lived, as yet in private and unknown. And when Jesus had come to be baptized by him, and he had heard the voice from heaven and seen the descending Spirit, the thought had flashed upon him who that meek and humble Nazarene must be. But we do not hear of his telling out any such higher belief about Jesus to the two disciples who stood by his side. He merely said in their presence, "Behold the Lamb of God."

But this was enough to stir up the two disciples to seek further. Looking with their own eyes on Jesus as He walked, and hearing their own revered master speak of Him in such tender and yet solemn and awful words, they followed Jesus as He walked. The scene which came after is told in very few words; but surely we can without effort picture it to

ourselves. Jesus turned round and saw the two disciples of John the Baptist following Him. He stopped and waited till they came up and asked them simply, "What seek ye?" A difficult question perhaps to answer. Most probably they had never thought of asking themselves what they wanted of Jesus, what they were to say to Him when they should overtake Him. Only His own look and the testimony of their master's language of reverence and almost worship had led them to desire dimly to draw near to Him and see more of Him: something, they knew not what, drew them onwards to His presence. Thus much they could say to themselves in that sudden moment when He asked them what they were seeking. Though they could give no direct answer, the impulse to see more of Him led them to ask Him another question in their turn.

First they called Him Rabbi, that is, Master or Teacher. Perhaps we hardly take in the force of this name. A few months later it would have been natural enough that Jesus should be called by the name belonging to great teachers. But as yet He had not begun to teach or shown any signs that that was to be any part of His work. He had come humbly to be baptized by John just like one of themselves. He had displayed no learning like the wise scribes at Jerusalem who sat in Moses' seat and explained the law. He had not preached in the wilderness in the fashion and in the form of an ancient prophet, like John the Baptist. But still they were sure, they could not tell how, that there were deep things which He knew and they knew not; and so

out of the fulness of their hearts they called him Rabbi. "Rabbi," they asked, "where dwellest thou?" He answered their half-formed wish rather than the words of their question, by saying only, "Come and see." The lesson which they had begun to learn through their eyes, through the mere sight of that heavenly face, they were to go on learning in the same way, still through their eyes, by seeing Him and His ways in the perfect retirement of His present home. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day; for it was about the tenth hour. What and where that home was, we are not told, and it is useless to guess. We should most of us be still more glad to know what took place there on that memorable afternoon, what passed between Jesus and the two disciples. But here too the Gospel is silent. We are told what followed, perhaps on the next day, and this gives us some idea of the impression made on the mind of at least one of the disciples by their stay with Jesus. "One of them," St. John goes on, "was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus."

The conclusion then at which St. Andrew arrived from what he had seen and heard with Jesus was that Jesus was the Messiah. Probably these words convey no very distinct impression to most of our minds, and it can hardly be wondered at that it should be so. To understand them in any degree we must remember that the Jews were above all

other nations the people of *hope*. Their history is full of grievous misfortunes and cruel shames, but they never ceased to look forward to a better time. The sense of belonging to the Lord, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, led them to expect a mighty being to come from God at some future day for their deliverance. Who this being should be they could but dimly guess; but to each he seemed destined to be the sure and faithful deliverer from whatever evil pressed most heavily upon him. One expected the Messiah to bring peace, another expected Him to bring freedom, another expected Him to restore the ancient glory of Israel, and so with all the rest. Messiah was the one expected helper to come forth from God in whom all hopes met.

And now let us ask how did Andrew find out Jesus to be the Messiah? There is no reason to think that Jesus told him so. The more carefully we study our Lord's own words about Himself, the more convinced we shall be that He made no such discovery to an inquiring disciple at this early period. He had seen no miracles to convince him, for it is not till the next chapter that we hear of Christ's first miracle. As far as we can judge, every sign of outward power was wanting; for all he could see, Jesus might be the weakest and most helpless of mankind. What was it then that led him to speak so confidently to Peter? Surely it must have been, first, the effect of Christ's unutterable goodness; and, secondly, that of Christ's inward power, the power of spirit over spirit. Good men, no doubt, as we

commonly call men good, he had seen and known before, as almost all of us have done ; but here was One whose deep and perfect goodness made Andrew feel as if he were in the presence of God Himself. His own heart was sound and right enough to know the true marks of One come from God. Our thoughts about God almost always rule and fashion our thoughts about every one else. This fisherman Andrew was accustomed to think first of infinite goodness when he thought about God : and so the sight of wonderful goodness in a man was to him a sign that that man came in an especial manner from God. And so also he recognized the rule which Christ was bearing over his secret heart and mind. Like the Samaritan woman who cried, "Come see the man who told me all that ever I did ; is not this the Christ?" he felt himself every hour more completely bowed down before Him whom, at the first words He uttered, he had been constrained to call Rabbi. From such a source he knew that all could flow which he or others could ever hope for. In such a one he could believe that the God of Israel was indeed visiting His people.

This happy discovery however Andrew did not dream of keeping to himself. His first thought was to tell it to his brother Peter, and to bring him to Christ. His brother, it seems, was willing to come, and so for the first time Simon Peter, the founder of the Christian Church, stood before Jesus. We have already seen in the account given in the Gospel how the two brothers on a later day heard Christ call them as they were fishing, and how they followed

Him without delay. We shall surely read that Gospel with fresh interest when we remember how the one brother was first himself led to know his Lord and how he then brought the other brother to share his privilege.

It would be out of place to say much about St. Peter to-day. I will only remind you how many of his sayings and doings are recorded in the Gospels, how large a place he fills in the Acts of the Apostles, how he is mentioned repeatedly by St. Paul, and himself wrote part of the New Testament. He is beyond all comparison the most famous and the best known of the Twelve Apostles. And now how stands it with Andrew? Except in these few verses of St. John we hear nothing whatever of him beyond his name. He was, we know, one of the Twelve, and must have borne his share of the work which was laid on them. But what it was or how it was done, we know not. As far as the Bible is concerned, the one single action by which he will be known to Christian people to the end of the world is by his having brought another man to Christ, even St. Peter.

When we consider it, brethren, this is a thought well worthy of being deeply weighed and remembered. We often are tempted in one mood to ask ourselves or others, Of what possible use can this or that man be in the world? Or in what may sometimes be a better and a humbler, but never a right mood, we question with ourselves of what use *we* can possibly be: often the next result is that we resolve to go our own way and seek our own pleasure, because we

cannot think that what we do can matter to any one else. In our blindness and our pride (for pride it is, though we may call it humility) we do not see how deep and subtle and manifold is God's Providence, how He uses His creatures to minister to each other step over step in a wonderful order. A Peter may be only the last link in the chain by which God works out a mighty purpose: men see him and think not of any other, while all the while an Andrew is just as needful for God's purposes; he is the next link, and without him perhaps a Peter would not be. The fiery zeal, the vigorous action of Peter may be required for some things; and yet those very qualities may make his heart too hot and restless to discern first for himself the Divine glory in the gentle eye and voice of the Lamb of God. He must be led there by the hand of Andrew, one of calmer but more heavenly spirit, though not fit perhaps for stirring deeds. When Andrew's own task is done, he falls into the background, but he is not forgotten before God: that it may be known that there are differences of workings, but that it is the same God which worketh all in all.

Notice again how little we can judge whether a matter be great or small. Picture to yourselves that time when the two disciples followed Jesus and spent the rest of the day where He dwelt, in some remote corner of Judea: could anything have seemed more petty, less concerning the world at large? And yet, brethren, that was the beginning of the Church of which we are members. That meeting led to the call of the earliest apostles, and through them of all

Christians. What Andrew discovered and told Peter, was by him told to others, and from them it has spread on and on even to ourselves. The good news which Andrew invited Peter to share was the first message in the good news which we call the Gospel of Christ. Shall we ever dare again to think, and act on the thought, that our good or our evil are for ourselves alone, and not for all with whom we have anything to do?

Lastly, learn from Andrew's own experience how God in Christ makes Himself known to the hearts of men. There were thousands in that day who were ever on the look out for the Messiah, and yet saw Him not when He came among them: such were the men who sought to stone Him, and who at last crucified Him. Andrew, the ignorant fisherman, was able to see the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, only because his hopes and desires were such as none but One of perfect holiness and goodness could satisfy. When he met with Jesus, he needed no proofs to tell him that he had found One come from God. With the man of simple trusting heart, who strives to be delivered from his own sin and burns with love to God and man, Christ Himself, the image of the Father's love, will surely dwell: and such an one will find in Christ the fulfilment of all his best hopes, will rise up at His call, and cheerfully follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

XIII

THE BIBLE. (1.) THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son."—*Hebrews* i. 1, 2.

I PROPOSE to begin to-day a course of sermons on the Bible. In speaking to you from Sunday to Sunday on the lessons contained in separate texts, as I have hitherto done almost without exception, I have often felt doubtful how much I might take for granted as already known to the greater number of the congregation. Every one here, I trust, knows some little about the Bible; every one has read, or has heard, some parts of it, and has carried away some impression from what he has read or heard. Some few, of course, are well acquainted with most of what the Bible contains. I imagine that all except a few are tolerably familiar with the sound of those chapters which are read in church, and some other chapters; that they have carried away with them, and hold more or less clearly in their memories,

a few of the most striking stories and the clearest and most forcible sayings; but that they could not often tell the place in the Bible of what they do remember, or explain how one thing follows after another, and that of the greater part of the Bible they have no knowledge at all.

I am not saying this by way of blame; I am only trying to put into words what seems to be the plain fact. There is of course some blame attaching to all wants of this kind. If we cared for the Bible more, we should read it more, and take more pains to understand it and remember it. Still there is much excuse for a great deal of ignorance. Of course those who have been at school have gone through some of the most important books of the Bible in a regular and careful way. But unfortunately we have not time at school to do as much as we could wish, or to do anything as well as we could wish. And after school-time it is only too easy to forget what we have learned, if we do not keep it up by constant reading for ourselves, and trying to make sure of the meaning of what we read.

What I wish now to do is to help you to understand in a general way what there is in the Bible, to explain to you the contents and the use of its different parts and books, to point out how one joins on to another, how we learn from one what we do not and cannot learn from another. In this way dim and hazy impressions may be changed into clear and well-ordered knowledge, and the new interest in the Bible which I trust some of you will gain may lead you to read it for yourselves more eagerly and care-

fully in future. Speaking about large parts of the Bible at once, I shall not often have time or opportunity to dwell on single texts; but this is much more an advantage than a loss. Such sermons as those to which we are most accustomed, sermons examining and explaining a single text, are at all times useful and perhaps necessary. There is no better way of bringing before a regular congregation those great truths on which the whole Christian life is founded. But sermons on single texts have one great disadvantage: they help to keep up that mischievous notion which is everywhere so common, that the Bible is nothing but a collection of texts, into which we may put our hand and draw out at random whatever we please without troubling ourselves to think where it came from. Few texts, perhaps none, can ever be quite understood while they are taken alone, cut away from the place in the Bible in which they stand. And many of the most precious truths of the Bible are not to be found in any text at all; they come into our minds only when we think of whole chapters and books together.

A more serious objection to keeping to this one subject for a long time together is that it takes us away in some degree from the ever-pressing needs of our own wants, and our own duties. It is in great measure concerned with what is sometimes called head-knowledge. It is quite possible for us to know a great deal about the Bible, to be able to answer questions about its books, and what there is in them, to be able to tell its stories, and even to explain the meaning of its sayings, and yet have no true sense of

its divine power, to remain untouched by the voice of the Holy Spirit within it speaking to our spirit, to forget altogether that it has been given us after all to teach us God's will concerning us, and to help us to draw nigh to Him. I feel this most strongly, and am anxious that you should now and always feel it too. Yet I do not believe that it is unprofitable for virtue and godly living and the love of Christ to have our thoughts led in church to such views about the Bible as require little more than dry understanding. Knowledge is not religion; yet assuredly want of knowledge very often leads to want of religion. If we were more interested in the Bible, we should love it more, and drink in more of its blessed spirit, and without knowledge it is impossible to have more than a narrow and soon exhausted interest.

Knowledge then, a knowledge of the mere contents of the Bible, is really a step towards increase of religion; it clears away many of the hindrances which keep us from hearing what God speaks to us, it makes us feel at home with the Bible, and that is the beginning of learning to use it as our guide in the daily thoughts and the daily actions of life.

There is no congregation in the whole Church which needs nothing but warning and exhorting; all need teaching likewise. It is not enough to be told what we should feel, and think, and say, and do. We want to have the story of God's wondrous dealings with men in past time impressed on our minds; and many of us will never be able to understand it unless it is explained to them. We want to have the

great unchanging truths about God and man and the world in which He has set man grasped firmly and made a part of our constant belief; and that we can never do without help from others. God's kingdom is indeed, blessed be His name, ever open to the ignorant and the dull: it is the pure in *heart* who shall see God. Yet in respect to the Bible especially, it remains true that whatever helps our understanding helps also in the long run our praying and our working.

I hope to be able to carry on this course of sermons with tolerable regularity. It may now and then be interrupted, either by special days of the Christian year, or by various accidental reasons. I trust however that on the whole I may be able to go on from week to week, so that what is said on one Sunday may not be forgotten before the next time. For the same reason I shall not at present attempt to give a Sunday to each book. There are so many books in the Bible that I could hardly expect to carry your memories on with me throughout; and I am especially desirous that you should at the end remember the beginning, that you should be able to take in the whole together, and to have the different parts of the Bible before your minds at once, just as we can see the different parts of a picture all at once.

Let me suggest also that you will find it a great help to take your own Bibles when you go home, and look over the part that you have been hearing about in church, trying whether you cannot read for yourselves there some of the things which you have heard mentioned from this place. Indeed, you will find

enough to employ you if you have time to carry on the subject during the week, and in this way you will fix it more firmly into your minds, and be better prepared to understand what you hear the next time.

It will be enough to-day to speak of the Bible altogether, and to point out quite shortly the two great parts of which it consists. I do not propose to dwell at any length on the character and value of the Bible. Little is gained by using high-flown language about it. It is a book literally above praise: there is a kind of impertinence in praising it. The best praise we can render it is to use it; to read, and practise, and read again. It was written for our learning: let us take care that it finds us teachable, willing to learn, possessed with a deep feeling of needing its help. And how is it that it is able to give us such help? For two reasons: because it is, above all other books, the book of man, and because it is the book of God. It is the book of man, not only because it was written by men, but because it is full of the deepest thoughts, longings, desires, struggles, victories of men, their best work done on the earth, their most passionate cries to the heaven above. It is the book of God, because in it we hear what He spoke to other ages, and through every part of it He speaks to us now, telling us what He has done for men in the days of old, what He has done for all mankind in all times, what He is doing for us now; pointing out the way to Himself, encouraging us to enter on that way, warning us of the dangers which beset us by the way, giving us gleams of light from above to cheer us and guide us on the way.

This is all that I think it necessary to say at present about the Bible as one single book. At a later time we may perhaps return to this subject with greater advantage. Let us now think of the Bible not as one, but as many books. This is an important fact about it which is too often forgotten. The latest part of it is very old—nearly eighteen hundred years old—but the oldest part of it is far older than that, going back into distant times, when it is impossible to talk of years with any certainty. And from the time of the oldest books to the newest the other books made their appearance one after the other without much pause. Some were written just as they stand: others evidently had small beginnings, and have grown up by slow degrees to their present form. Some were written by great men, whose names are familiar to us for other reasons; others we have received without any sure knowledge of who it was that wrote them. Kings, priests, prophets, shepherds, fishermen, tentmakers—these and other classes of men had their share in building up our Bible. Some of the books had their first beginnings in wild and barbarous times, others in settled times of law and order. Some were written in bright prosperity, others in the midst of terrors and distresses from warfare with powerful enemies, others from the depths of captivity itself. One thing alone all the authors had in common: they all alike belonged to one people—they were all Jews, worshippers of the one God of Israel.

The first great division which meets us in the Bible is that of the Old and New Testaments. You

all know these names, but I do not think their meaning is well understood. People often speak of the Testament as if there were but one, when they mean the New Testament. But the Old Testament is as much a part of the Bible; and we should go strangely astray, if we were to take all our notions of God's works and ways from the New Testament. 'Testament' means the same thing as 'covenant.' Neither word is very easy to explain shortly. I think you will see its meaning best by regarding it as the kind of *understanding* which God has with men, the footing on which He deals with them at one time or another. God Himself does not change, but men are always changing; and God's ways of dealing with them cannot therefore always be the same. A father is on different terms with his son, according as he is still a child or has grown up to manhood. Supposing the father to be wise and loving, and the son to be dutiful and loving too, still when childhood has passed there will be a change in the outward form and the inward spirit of the understanding between them; there will usually be less of actual commanding and obeying, more of sympathy and mutual helpfulness.

Now the Jewish people went through a change like that. God promised by the mouth of Jeremiah (xxxi. 31 ff.) that in due time He would make a new covenant, a new testament, with the house of Israel, writing His law no longer on tables of stone, but in their hearts and inward parts; and that promise was fulfilled when Christ came. Properly therefore the Old Testament means God's manner

of dealing with His people in the old time before Christ came, and the New Testament His new manner of dealing with His people after Christ came. And then the books take their names from the state of things described there. We call the earlier books for shortness the Old Testament, because they tell us about God's ways under His Old Testament or Covenant. We call the later books for shortness the New Testament, because they set forth the nature of God's New Testament or Covenant, which began for mankind with the death and resurrection of His Blessed Son.

This leads us to the great difference between the books of the Old and New Testaments, as declared in the text. I have before preached on those words from the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews as a Christmas text: to-day they will help us to see the likeness and the unlikeness of the two great divisions of the Bible. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." First, Old and New Testaments have this one thing in common—God speaks in both. He spoke to the men of old time. He spoke to the men of the apostles' generation. What He taught both the one and the other is written down in the two parts of the Bible, and through that writing He still speaks to us.

So much for the sameness; now for the differences. Under the old covenant He spoke to the fathers, the forefathers of the apostles—yes, and the spiritual forefathers of us, for we too are the children of

Moses and David and Isaiah, drawing our life from them and their work. But He could not speak to them all at once, for they lived at different times; many hundreds of years divided them. He could not speak to them all alike, for they were in different stages of growth and knowledge, and what would suit one would not suit another. So He spoke to them at sundry times and in divers manners, here a little and there a little, making the different and partial and broken declarations of His name and His will combine together into one whole, bestowing thus on the later generations a richer and fuller knowledge than any of their forefathers had enjoyed. Lastly, all this speech of His under the Old Testament was through prophets, men liable to fall into weakness and sin, each declaring some part of God's message, but only a part, each bearing his witness chiefly by words, each at best a trusty *messenger*, but nothing more.

But in those last days a new order of things had come in. No longer in broken and scattered words from the stammering lips of men, no longer by a line of various messengers; but in one perfect life full of glorious words and full of deeds which had a yet more powerful voice than words, God had spoken once for all, and that life was the life of His only begotten Son, the exact likeness of His own nature, so far as it could be expressed in human character. This then is the substance of the New Testament—God speaking in His Son. The words apply in the simplest and truest sense to the Gospels, but as we shall see presently they may take in likewise what-

ever is contained in all our books of the New Testament, Acts and Epistles and Revelation as well. The Old Testament brings before us the hope of man, the promise of God ; the New makes known the glory and rest of man, the fulfilment of God.

Next time I hope to speak of the Old Testament more particularly, especially of its first five books. I trust we shall be able to see how little we can afford to do without those records of an early time, even now that we are living in the sunshine of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He came not to destroy, He Himself tells us, but to fulfil. Looking back into the dim early world in which the faith in the one true God began, we are enabled to read its story not only with heightened interest, but with greatly increased profit, now that we can turn upon it the light which comes from the Perfect Son in whom the Father was well pleased. And again, the form of the Son Himself rises in far greater clearness and glory before our eyes when we have learned to know and love His many forerunners from Abraham onwards, and so been duly prepared to welcome at last the full message of the kingdom of heaven.

XIV

THE BIBLE. (II.) THE OLD TESTAMENT A HISTORY OF THE JEWS

"In Jewry is God known: His name is great in Israel."—*Psalm* lxxvi. 1.

A FORTNIGHT ago we began to consider the Bible and its different parts. We saw that first and foremost it is divided into two great well-known parts, the Old and New Testaments, neither of which ought to be read and cherished without the other. The name Testament, we saw, which is the same as Covenant, means here properly the kind of understanding between God and His people, the particular footing on which He treats them. In old times they were like children, they needed a different sort of treatment from what they need in later days, and so they were under the Old Covenant or Testament, and the book called the Old Testament is the account of what God spoke to them in one way or another under that Old Covenant. But when Christ came another state of things began. God's people had grown ripe

for a new and more advanced teaching. He took them into a New Covenant or Testament. His dealings with them were on a new footing; and the book called the New Testament is the account of what God has spoken to them in one way or another under that New Covenant.

Still the old is not meant to be driven out by the coming in of the new. When we pass from childhood to manhood, we are still the same creatures in body and mind, though much be changed and much added. We do not begin all over again. We carry with us to our grave that which has been formed within us in our early years. The teaching we have received as children does not all at once lose its value. Some of it having been learned once for all does not need to be repeated, but still we should fare badly if it were lost out of our minds. Some of it again has till now been obliged to be put in such shapes as a young head and heart can receive: when we grow up, we can take it in more truly and more completely in another shape; but still we shall do well not to forget either, if we wish to have a hold on the perfect truth. Lastly, even the best and ripest among us are always liable to fits of what we must consider as childishness, slipping back into a wild and ungoverned state which they ought to have outgrown, and for them assuredly the rougher and more childish kind of teaching has not lost its use.

Even so is it with the Old and New Testaments. There are many things in the Old Testament which belong to the old state of things, and cannot without mischief be applied to us now exactly as they stand.

There is an undying lesson in them, but it requires to be well-considered and explained before it can be applied. Yet, for all that, the value of the Old Testament for us is not worn out and cannot wear out. Though we are living in a late age of the world, many of us are still so unripe in heart and mind that the lessons of those early days have a special fitness for us. For all of us the Old Testament is a useful way of entrance into the New Testament. We never can understand the New Testament while we are ignorant of the Old Testament. It supplies as it were the alphabet, the letters, the simple thoughts, in which the higher and deeper lessons of the New Testament are written. Nay more, there is much about our life here on earth as God would have it be which is taught plainly in the Old Testament, and which is either not taught at all or taught very slightly in the New Testament. Any one who tries to carve out for himself a religion out of the New Testament will assuredly make something extremely unlike the true complete Christian faith. He cannot throw away half his Bible without throwing away half of what should be his belief too.

I said to you before that all the books of the Bible, Old and New Testament alike, have one thing in common: they were all written by Jews, worshippers of the one God of Israel. Unless you get this fact clearly into your minds, you never can properly understand the Bible, least of all the Old Testament. You may be able to snatch at single stories and sayings here and there, but you will lose the thread of the chapters which you hear or read,

and in losing the thread lose at the same time most of the meaning. No doubt there is something wearisome and uninteresting in hearing much said in a sermon about a people so little familiar to us as the Jews. They seem such a long way off from us and our concerns. We naturally wish to hear about something nearer home, something which comes within the borders of our own everyday thoughts and doings. I know, brethren, this is so, and must be so, and thus there is a great temptation to let the Jews alone, and try to say nothing about old times. But then I know also that by so doing I should be leaving the greater part of the Bible a closed book to you. My opportunities of speaking to you are short and few, while you have your Bibles always with you. At any time you please you have only to open them, and find yourselves in the presence of a teaching infinitely wiser and more heavenly than that of any living man. You have also the promise of the Holy Spirit to enkindle you and enlighten you as you read. But still there does remain a veil over the Bible, so long as the people to whom and for whom it was first written are to us no more than strangers and foreigners, and I believe I can do you no greater service by way of bringing you face to face with the Bible, than in trying to take away that strangeness, and helping you to think about the Jews as friends of your own, about whom you are always glad to hear.

Every time that I speak to you about the Bible, I shall be obliged also to speak about the Jews. In trying to describe and explain the different parts of

the Bible I shall be going through the different stages in the life of the Jews. So far therefore teaching about the Jews cannot come altogether in one sermon, but must be spread over all. Not till the course is ended shall we be in a position to obtain a full and clear view of their wonderful career. Yet now at starting some little explanation is required, that there may be no mistakes hereafter; and to make sure that we are not going on too fast, I shall begin with very simple and easy matters.

We call the Jews a people. What does that mean? It generally means a number of persons bound together by three things: by having one blood, one language, one land. Other bonds often, nay usually, come in, such as one set of customs, one law, one government, one religion. But the three I have mentioned are the most constant.

First, one blood. Perhaps nothing binds men so closely to each other as the knowledge or belief that they are all of one race, as we call it, all sprung originally from the same parents. The feeling of being all more or less of kin, all connected by a sort of cousinhood, is in fact a true, though it may be a weaker, feeling of brotherhood. In late times the purity of the race gets often broken in upon by intermarriage with foreigners, yet still the new comers are thought of as adopted into the great old family: the family feeling is strong enough to embrace them without losing its own power. The Jews mixed wonderfully little with other people till quite late in their history, and the family feeling was part of their religion. One of the names by which they are called is 'the children of

Israel.' Generation after generation was thus taught to look back to the first beginnings of the people. Each new life moved further and further away from the days of Israel or Jacob, yet still it was their delight to remember that Israel was the first father of them all. Divine strength to do and to endure came upon them whenever they cherished that thought. It lifted them out of base and earthly things. It carried them half-way to God. For God Himself was likewise known to them in the same form. Declaring Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He brought Himself near to them through the irrecollections of their forefathers. And again, He strengthened their attachment to each other, their dutiful reverence for those who had gone before, their care for their children and their children's children by this name, which reminded them that the one same unseen King and Friend, never dying, never forgetting, was watching over one and all.

Secondly, a people is held together by speaking one language. Most of you know, I suppose, that almost every country has its own set of words, and that the words used in one country are quite different from those used in another to express the same thing. Generally all the persons in one country grow up able to understand what is said by other persons in the same country, and to make themselves understood by them ; but if a man leaves his own country and goes to another, he finds everyone using a totally different set of sounds when they speak, and he cannot understand them or make himself understood unless he has taken the pains to learn

their way of speaking as well as his own. These different ways of speaking are called languages; and, as I said, one of the things which most holds a people together, which makes them in fact to be a people, is speaking the same language. When they are young children, they learn it little by little from hearing it all round them, even if they are not purposely taught; it grows up with them as part of themselves, a part which they cannot possibly lose so long as they are among their own people. They seldom or never think about it, but they are for ever using it as naturally as they put out their hand to take what they want. If now they come across men of another people, speaking another language, this difference of speech makes at once a deep gap between them. Even if they after a time get over the difficulty of understanding and being understood, they seem to themselves to have fallen in with creatures of another world, and they go back to their own people with an increased feeling of belonging to them and of having far more in common with them than with any others.

This bond of language the Jews possessed. One or two other neighbouring nations may perhaps have spoken languages not very unlike theirs. But their own language, as time went on, acted more and more powerfully in making them a people. Almost from the first it became intermixed with their thoughts about God. First the memory of His commandments as written on the tables of stone or spoken by the lips of Moses, then the possession of holy books, the short beginnings of a Bible, led them to feel that

their common speech was not merely the necessary means of conversing with each other on the things of everyday life, but also supplied the outward form in which God spoke to their fathers and to them. Thus once more they were brought near to God through one of the things which kept them near each other, and again the more they thought of Him and the message of His will, the more they were reminded how they belonged to one people.

Again, men are made one people by dwelling in one land. We in England ought to understand this better than any people that ever lived, for nothing has been so helpful in making us of one heart and mind as the position of our country, smaller than most of the countries and shut off from the rest of the world by the sea all around it. Every tie that makes up neighbourhood has its part in fashioning into a people those who dwell in the same land. They are always nearer to each other than to foreigners, and how much does not that carry along with it? If a foreign enemy comes against the land, they all alike suffer from his violence: if he is to be resisted or driven back, they must all make common cause and join together against him, each making sacrifices for the good of all. In each there naturally grows up an attachment to the soil on which he has been born and bred. It gives him a feeling of fixedness and lastingness in a world where so much is ever changing. The land has been present at all the acts of his life; he has played upon it in childhood, worked upon it in manhood. And what it is to him, that it is also to his

neighbours, his countrymen. He cannot think of it as something which belongs merely to himself, he is too small a creature for that, he and all like him. The land which all alike tread bears the clearest evidence to the need which each has of all the rest. It is all one ample home where each knows that he has a right to find his proper place as a child of the one family; a common ground in which every other power of union is able to root itself.

And such was Judea, or Jewry, the land of Israel, to the Jews, the children of Israel. It too was a little land, partly divided from the lands of other peoples by the sea on one side and barren wildernesses on two other sides. The affection which they bore it was one of the most powerful ties which helped them to feel that they were indeed one at times when other causes were tearing them asunder. God saw fit that for their sins they should be carried away prisoners into a strange land, and there they seemed ready to be scattered away and leave no trace on the face of the earth, till in due time part of them obtained leave to return to their own country, and then once more the people rose out of the dust. And again, as in the memory of their common forefathers, as in the language which father handed down to son, so in this case also we cannot understand the religion of the Jews—that same religion which is the foundation of our own, and to this very day part of our own, if we leave out of mind their land, and all of which their land spoke to them. It was, as we shall hear presently, the Land of Promise. They believed that God had promised it to their

first father Abraham more than four hundred years before they were allowed to claim it as their own. Their entrance into it was marked by wonderful signs of God's presence and favour, and He taught them to look on continuance upon its sacred soil as the highest earthly blessing, the best reward for those who obeyed His laws. No wonder that it became to them a kind of heaven upon earth, a place which seemed full of God, so that banishment from its holy places had something of the bitterness of banishment from Him. No wonder that the land which He had glorified with such marks of His love made precious every rightful dweller upon it, and was felt by all true Israelites to call on them in His Name to rejoice together and suffer together.

We have now considered, brethren, the three chief signs which mark a people in the proper sense of the word, and which the Bible shows to have marked the ancient people of God, the Jews. They were all descended from Abraham and his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob or Israel. They all spoke the same language, the language of the Old Testament. They all dwelt in the same land. So far they were in great measure like other peoples, old and new. The difference was that God made Himself known to no other people. That is what renders their history a treasure of the highest and best instruction to us; not a mere subject of curiosity for those who have time and opportunity to busy themselves about things that happened so very long ago, but a possession meant for the use of every one of us. What makes the Bible, as I said before, the book of

God is that in it He is speaking to man, speaking first and last of Himself, but also in a lesser degree of all things which lead to Him. But He speaks to us by acts as well as by words. The Bible is the history of acts of His, as well as a collection of words of His. If we know what He has done, we know what He is. Now all the acts of His related in the Bible are one way or another concerned with the Jewish people, and all the writers in the Bible were themselves members of the Jewish people. The Old Testament is especially the history of the Jewish people up to within a few years of its last scattering, telling us as much of it as we need to know for the sake of understanding the plan of God's dealing with men. Next week we shall, I trust, be able to take the first few books, in which we read how the people first came into being.

Meanwhile let us take to ourselves the lesson which a true Israelite in the middle or later time of his nation's history drew from the acts of God which already lay before his sight. "The merciful and gracious Lord," he says, "hath so done his marvellous works that they ought to be had in remembrance. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and equity. He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever; holy and reverend is his name. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do thereafter, the praise of it endureth for ever."

XV

THE BIBLE. (III.) THE PENTATEUCH—GENESIS

"HEARKEN to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him."—*Isaiah* li. 1, 2.

LAST Sunday we considered the Jewish people, the children of Israel, because it was necessary to have some sort of clear notion about them if we wished to understand the greater part of the Bible. We saw that, whatever God spoke to the rest of mankind, He spoke through Jews and to Jews: that God's acts, by which He speaks even more than by words, His acts, that is, as told in the Bible, were acts in the history of the Jews. We cannot therefore know at all exactly what either His words or His acts really meant unless we know something about the Jews themselves. We saw that they formed a people, a set of men bound together by being of the same blood, by speaking the same language, and by dwelling in the same land. We saw how these

different ties which bound them to each other bound them also to God. As they were the children of Israel, that is, all having Jacob or Israel for their father, so He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, known to them as the same Lord who had also been Lord of their family in all generations. The language which they spoke in all common business of life, and which made them closer to each other than any foreigners, was the language in which His Law was written on the tables of stone, and in which in the course of time holy books were written as a perpetual fixed message of His will. The land in which they dwelt together as neighbours, or rather as children of the same great family, in one wide home, was also the Land of Promise, given them by God more than four hundred years before they took possession of it, holy in itself, containing within it the holy place which was the outward sign of God's presence on the earth.

To-day we begin to examine the early books of the Old Testament itself. The first five books stand together by themselves. Sometimes they are called the Pentateuch, which means only "The book of five volumes." The Jews themselves used to call them "the Law," because the latter part contained the law of God given through Moses, by which the people was more or less governed in the later times. This name is full of meaning to us. God speaks to us men with different voices, and one of those voices is that of the Lawgiver. If our lives are to be right and happy, and every way blessed, we must begin by remembering that there are rules laid down for us to

follow, rules given us by One both higher and wiser than we are, to guide us in the temptations and perplexities of life, rules which we disobey at our peril. This is only a part of what we ought to think about God, but it is a part which it is never safe to forget: for so long as there is any evil in the world, and any inclination to follow evil, so long there must be obedience to a law, and so long we must never forget that God is the Maker of the Law.

We shall have to return to this subject in due course presently. But first we must attend to the place which these five books hold in the history of the Jews. Speaking roughly, we may say that they tell us the *beginning* of the Jewish people, the early steps and stages by which they became a people. All through these five books one of the three great marks of a people which I mentioned last Sunday is wanting to them. They are of one blood. They speak one language, but they have no land of their own. For four hundred years they are captives and slaves in a foreign land; for forty years they are ever on the move, wandering on through the trackless wilderness. Just at the end we see that their journeyings are coming to an end: in the next book they enter the Promised Land and take possession of it. But that does not concern us to-day. In the books about which I am now speaking they are always on the way; on the way to a home of their own, on the way to become a full grown and complete people.

I said just now that this is a rough account of these five books. Speaking strictly, it is true only of

the last four out of the five. The first book, Genesis, tells of a still earlier state of things, the time before the four hundred years of the Israelites in Egypt began, the time when as yet there was living but one small family, from whom all that great multitude were to spring. The greater part of the book of Genesis, that is, the last thirty-nine chapters from the twelfth chapter onwards, is taken up with the patriarchs, as they are called, the earliest heads of the family, first Abram or Abraham, then his son Isaac, then *his* son Jacob or Israel, then *his* twelve sons, from whom came the twelve tribes of Israel.

This carries us back within a very few pages of the beginning of the Bible. In those few pages we find ourselves in the time before Abraham, yet earlier ages of mankind, and at last in the first and second chapters at the very beginning of the world. Here at the very outset we are shown what is to be the true subject of the Bible from its first page to its last; it is to be God speaking to us about Himself. Mark that well: He has something to tell us about the world in which He has placed us, much to tell us about ourselves and our fellow-men; but all that He has to tell us in the Bible about any of these things is for the sake of religion, for the sake of bringing Himself near to us and drawing us near to Himself.

This is a very important matter, on which we have great need to see our way clearly. The Bible is the best of books, but it cannot take the place of other books. It brings to us the highest, the most life-giving, the most entirely necessary knowledge. There are many things most useful for us to know,

still more which it is most interesting and delightful to know, which are certainly not to be found in the Bible. But it is a blunder to look for them there. If we try to do that, if we try to force the Bible to teach us what it was not meant to teach us, we are in great danger of missing its true lessons, and glorifying our own foolish fancies as if they came from God.

For the purposes of religion all beings that exist fall under three great heads: Man, nature or the outward world, and God. How they may be connected with each other, what part one may have in the others, is a secondary matter. The great thing is to see the distinctness of these three and the rightful place which the outward world and God hold towards man. This is taught with marvellous power in these opening chapters of Genesis. I do not in the least pretend to be able to understand all in these chapters. They are full of serious difficulties which will perhaps never be cleared up; at all events, no one has cleared them up as yet. But I do not think they do us any harm, if we read the chapters in a right spirit.

Let us just look quietly at some of the great truths which lie on the surface, truths by no means natural and easy to reach for those who have not been bred up in them, contradicting, in fact, many of the notions which in former ages, and in part even in our own, have been most widely spread among mankind.

We see at the beginning of all things God Himself, making all things. He is not the earth, or the heavens, or anything that is therein: He is distinct from them

all: He made them all: He was before them all. He made them according to a plan and order. Each part of the world had its own work to do, its own place in His great scheme. Last of all came man The world was older than man, it supplied the materials for man: man was a part of the world, and was meant to remember that. On the other hand, there was that in man which could be found nowhere else in the world. If his mere clay was kneaded of the dust of the earth, the pattern was a heavenly one. His truest likeness was to be found in God Himself. Though he was younger than the world, he was to be the first example of that which meets us so often in the Bible, and in our own life. The elder was to serve the younger. God gave man dominion over the older world, and all that it contained. It was not only to be beautiful and glorious for the delight of its Maker, it was to be useful for the service of man. But here came in a most necessary lesson. God pronounced the whole world good. In the course of time man in his pride would look down on the world. Nay worse, when he became evil himself, he would lay the blame on the world. He would pretend that the only thing which made him sin was his connexion with the earth, his own body, and all the things which had charms for his bodily senses. "No," said God, "that is not true, I made the world as truly as I made you; I made it, and so it is all good. Lift up your eyes, and look to *Me*, for I have given you that power, and you are sinking below your proper manhood if you do not exercise it; but do not try to leap off the earth for all that. Delight in the world as *My* world,

and then there will be no fear of its leading you away from me."

Here are some of the lessons of the Bible story of creation. We do not see their full force till we have experience of evil in ourselves. But in the lessons themselves there is as yet no whisper of evil. All is pronounced good; God stands over His twofold work, man and the world, the dwelling-place of man, and His blessing descends on both.

The next step brings us into the state into which sin has entered. I must not stop to point out the particulars. But I wish you to notice especially two things. First, the Bible does not begin with sin: it begins with innocence and goodness. That is its starting-point, and is meant to be our starting-point. Sin is not a proper part of ourselves: it has come into us as the mildew comes into the corn. We are to regard it as something foreign to us which we have to throw off. Our work is to purify not to destroy. Secondly, observe that the first evil is distinctly religious evil. The temptation comes through the fruit; but the great force of the temptation lies in impatience of the restraint which God for good reasons ordained; in trying to be independent of Him, in other words, of being as gods. And the first loss is a religious loss. To fly from God's presence is the immediate thought of those who before the fall had rejoiced in it. Then the other outward curses follow. The earth is no longer a garden but a place of thorns for those who have become estranged from its Maker and their own. Yet God does not hate His rebellious creature, though He visits him severely.

From the very beginning He provides a way of return. Toil and sorrow are henceforth man's lot. But they are not mere curses, it is man's own fault if he lets them be so. He may use them to lead him back into communion with his true Lord.

That however is a later lesson. At the first the rapid growth of evil is what is chiefly shown us. Estrangement from God leads to estrangement between men, even members of the same family. The husband becomes the accuser of the wife. The elder brother is jealous of the younger brother, and his jealousy has its natural fruit in murder. As mankind multiplies, so does crime. The earth, we are told, was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. Sin against God, cruelty and injustice against other men, went hand in hand. Then the just anger of God went forth, and used the powers of the world for the punishment of man. A flood of waters overwhelmed the sinful race, and only one small family was preserved. To these survivors, to Noah and his family, God renewed the blessing which He had given to Adam. He spoke of a covenant, an understanding, between Him and them and all their children's children. He made them understand that He was not a God who did according to His mere will and pleasure, but One whom they might trust as faithful and true.

Immediately however, evil sprung up afresh. It showed itself in a shameful want of respect in one of Noah's sons towards his father. Presently we hear of men joining together to build a high tower, whose top might reach to heaven. This was evidently

done out of pride against God; but He scattered them abroad on the face of the earth, and with the scattering came the beginning of different languages, so that henceforth the different branches of the same race became foreign to each other.

Such are the chief points in the first part of Genesis. We have been shown first the outward world, the heavens and the earth, under which and on which all the work of man has to be done. Then we have been shown all the sinful and distracted world of man, seemingly going further and further away from God, and falling into wild confusion within itself. At this point the new life begins, which was to go on growing and growing till it reached its full height in the person of Christ. God called on an old man named Abram to leave his country and his father's house and go into a land which He should show him, promising to make of him a great nation, and in him to bless all the families of the earth. This was the seed of the Jewish people: here we have in a few words the plan of the whole Bible, God making Himself known to a chosen few, that through them the whole race may be partakers in the blessed gift. That which was to be the glory of God's people Israel was also to be a light enlightening the Gentiles far and near. And the beginning of it all was the simple trust of one man. "By faith," says the Epistle to the Hebrews, "he obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." The rest of his life repeats the same strain in other forms. He who thus went forth into the wide world at God's command, believed in God's promise

that he should have a son in spite of all appearances, and then at last was ready to yield up that dear and precious son, because such seemed to him to be God's will. And so he became known as the Father of the faithful, the father of all those who, seeing but a very little way for themselves, delight to trust the Unseen Lord above all things, and bear witness in the simplest and purest way to that which is the true life for man.

I do not intend to go through the well-known stories of Isaac and Rebekah, of Jacob and Esau, of Jacob's journey and double marriage and return, and of all the changes of fortune which befel his favourite son Joseph through the envy of his brothers. I will only ask you to observe how wonderfully God's providence worked through all those things which seemed to be baffling it, and in particular what a strange chain of occurrences brought Jacob and his family into the land of Egypt, where it was needful they should pass their four hundred years of silent growth in the dark. There we must leave them for to-day, hoping next week to see them go forth as far as the borders of their Promised Land.

We began with the creation of the world: we end with the passage of a starving family from one land to another. In both cases the Bible is true to its own character: in both God is made known. We may see His working, if we will, in the boundless glory and wonder of the heavens and the earth. These are great and He is great in them. But deeper truths of His nature are declared to us in the thoughts and the doings of men; and for this teach-

ing we need neither to look on great and mighty men nor on vast hosts of men. The noblest work for mankind that He has ever ordained was begun when Abraham went forth from his home, carrying with him the undying seed of a true faith. We cannot measure the power which often lies in things which seem too small and trifling for our notice. It is on such that the choice of God lights. He chooses the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and He does so simply in satisfying the needs of their own spirits. Feeling themselves helpless and blind they cast themselves on His grace and wisdom ; the answer from above makes them new men, lights shining in the darkness, and God is glorified in the influence which they shed around them, and pass on to their children's children.

XVI

THE BIBLE. (IV.) EXODUS—DEUTERONOMY

"I AM the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."—*Exodus* xx. 2.

WE began last Sunday to examine the first five books of the Old Testament. We saw that they are chiefly taken up with describing the history of the Jews in the early days before they reached their own land of promise, and became in the strictest sense a people. We had not time to go beyond the first book, that which is called Genesis, which word means 'birth' or 'beginning of growth.' There we found several beginnings, one behind the other—the beginning of the Jews, the beginning of mankind, the beginning of the world; all told however in such a way, and such a way only, as is required for the purposes of religion, that is, for enabling us to know and act upon our true position before God, and to give us a true idea of the greatness and goodness of His works and His acts.

This applies especially to the first eleven chapters

of Genesis, and above all the first two chapters. There we have the great objects, God on the one side, the world on the other, and man in the midst between the two, set clearly before us in the true light. God is seen as distinct from the world, as making the world according to a regular plan or order, as making man after the world out of a part of the world, yet in His own heavenly likeness, as giving man dominion over the world, and teaching him that the world is for his use, whatever other purposes it may serve; as blessing the world and man alike, and calling both good. Then as a secondary thing, a blight coming from without upon that which was originally good, we see sin breaking in through the senseless pride and wilfulness of man. Then come fresh forms of sin ever growing from worse to worse—jealousy, hatred, murder, and a host of other abominations, rebellion against God going hand in hand with wrong-doing towards fellow-men, till the Flood came and swept them away. The world which God had given to be their home had within it powers of destruction as well as powers of nourishment; and at His command the waters went forth to destroy, to show that He hates evil, and that He is mightier than all.

One righteous man, Noah, and his family alone were saved. But the waters of the Flood had not washed away the taint of evil. Within Noah's own household appeared foul disrespect of the son for the father, a dark and threatening sign of the plague which, beginning within the family, should spread confusion and misery in all the dealings of men with

each other. We hear little of the dim ages which followed, as the race of Noah multiplied more and more and became scattered into different peoples. Suddenly out of the darkness rises a bright point of light, a true Star in the East, which has been growing and changing, and changing and growing from that moment till now, when it has become the bright world of the Christian faith. That point of light was the simple trust of one man, Abram the Hebrew, the first of the Jews, and so the beginner of the long course in which God has made Himself known to mankind through the Jews, our own true forefathers in things of the spirit. At God's command he went forth from the land where his family had dwelt, not knowing whither he went. This was the mark set on the chief actions of his life, that he walked by faith and not by sight, that he let himself be guided by Him whom no man can see, instead of trusting to the deceitful appearances of things which meet the bodily eye.

After Abraham came Isaac his son, after Isaac his son Jacob or Israel. About these three, the three patriarchs, the book of Genesis has much to tell us which, as I said last Sunday, you will do well to read for yourselves, but which would be only confusing were I to repeat it now. Then we hear about Israel's twelve sons, and especially his son Joseph. The great point in all this for us to attend to is the way in which the family was in God's good providence brought into Egypt. First, there is the accident of the famine, then the accident of Joseph's extraordinary advancement in Egypt, so that what

the mean jealousy of his brothers meant for his harm turned out not only for his own good but for the saving of them all. Here is an undying lesson of the way in which accidents are in the hands of God, and how He uses them for His highest purposes. The purpose in this case was that the infancy of the Jewish people should be spent in Egypt, a land already far advanced in building and manufactures and all the useful and ornamental arts of life, but sunk in gross darkness in the higher things of worship and virtuous living. It was a necessary school for God's people, a school in which they learned evil as well as good, but without which their later growth was, as far as we can see, impossible.

Thus far, at the end of the book of Genesis, we reached last Sunday. Four hundred years, at least so it seems, have passed away when the story of the next book, the book of Exodus begins. We have now to hear how the children of Israel came to leave Egypt. The four books about which I have to speak to-day take in only forty years, indeed, properly speaking, only the beginning and the ending of those forty years. But they are forty years which the Jews never forgot, and which we should never forget, for, except at the time of Christ, no other time of forty years has told so greatly and so lastingly on the fate of mankind and on our own. Those forty years were spent in the passage from Egypt to the Land of Promise. What our four books tell us falls under two heads, the more important events that happened on that journey, and the laws which God gave His people by the way. These two subjects are brought

close together in the text, which, as many of you know by the way it is quoted in the Catechism, is the proper heading to the Ten Commandments, the weightiest part of the law. "I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage: thou shalt have none other gods but me," and so on.

It is impossible to take these four books one by one for our purposes. They all declare some part of the Law, all but one tell some of the events which happened on the journey. In the book called Exodus we have the story of the departure from Egypt and the early times of the wandering, the giving of the Law, and part of the Law itself. In the book called Leviticus we have chiefly those directions of the Law which had to do with the outward service of God. In the book of Numbers we have the numbering of Israel and many stories belonging to both the earlier and the later times of the forty years, again with some parts of the Law. Lastly, in the book called Deuteronomy, Moses is represented as in a manner repeating what has gone before in other words, recalling to the people shortly before his death some of the chief things that had befallen them, preaching to them solemn warnings about their own conduct in the time to come, and pronouncing once more in an altered and improved shape many of the laws which had been earlier given. Then follows his death and burial, and so the book of Deuteronomy, the fifth in the Bible, ends.

In what I have to say to-day I shall not attempt to keep these four books distinct. It will be much

clearer to treat them as if they formed one book, of which the contents should all be considered at once. One name binds the whole together. The first chapter of Exodus tells of the birth of Moses, the last chapter of Deuteronomy tells of the death of Moses. All that lies between is in one way or another concerned with Moses; he is always either leading the people or speaking to the people. Here we have at once a great step forward from what chiefly occupied us last Sunday. Then we had before us a single man, Abraham. That one man was the beginning of the Jewish people, they were all sprung from him, we might think of them as gathered up in him. That one man was also the friend of God, receiving messages direct from God, speaking to God as a man speaks to his friend. In him, the first of the Jews, notwithstanding his occasional wrong-doings, we seem to recognize once more that happy trustful intercourse with God which Adam is described as enjoying before his fall. But now at the beginning of Exodus God's promise to Abraham has been already fulfilled when He said to him, "I will make of thee a great nation." Instead of a lonely wanderer we have a whole people of wanderers. Instead of a single friend of God, conversing with God of the affairs of his own life, we have Moses the prophet of God speaking in God's name to the whole people, about the affairs of the whole people, speaking in the people's name to God; in a word, as St. Paul calls him, a mediator, or middle man between God and the people. Moses is the first example in the Bible of a true prophet, that is, of a man who

speaks to other men in the name and authority of God, whose own heart is first filled with a message which he knows to be from God, and then pours forth from his lips that which he feels himself constrained to speak. What his work as a leader was we learn from every chapter which describes what befel the people between Egypt and the Promised Land.

In the latter days of the stay in Egypt the children of Israel suffered much from the cruelty of King Pharaoh, who made slaves of them, and ground down their lives under the lash with the severest labour. Most of you know, I hope, the story of Moses' infancy and early manhood. You will remember how his heart was stirred up within him when he saw one of his brother Israelites ill-used by an Egyptian, so that he slew the Egyptian, and how he was obliged to flee away into the desert and keep sheep. There in the burning bush God made Himself known to him as the God of his father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He in whom those honoured forefathers had trusted and not been confounded was speaking now to the outcast slave, declaring His own purpose to deliver his enslaved brethren out of their bondage and bring them into the good Land of Promise, and appointing him to do the work. Moses returns to Egypt and fulfils God's command. After a series of wonderful signs which do not move the obstinate king, he leads out the children of Israel on the night of the Passover. The Red Sea is divided before them, and they march safely over, while the Egyptians, who follow, are

overwhelmed by the waters. Moses leads them on through the wilderness, following the guidance of God, in spite of their murmurs and doubts. Though they were the chosen people of God, they were also a crowd who had only just ceased to be slaves, and who had all the vices of slaves, who disliked the painfulness of being beaten and forced to work against their will; but, when they had been set free from that, shrank in a lazy and cowardly way from the duties and responsibilities of freedom, and would have been content to go back to slavery, if only they might have along with it once more the animal pleasures which, as slaves, they had been able to snatch. They hankered, we are told, after the fleshpots of Egypt. But this could not be. God loved them too well to indulge them. His purposes for them were higher and better than they could imagine. He desired to train them to the full glory of freedom and manhood. He intended through them in due time to bless all the nations of the earth.

How then was He to begin to mould this disorderly half-brutish crowd into a true people fit to carry His name? There was but one way: by a law, by fixed commandments and rules which had to be obeyed. Till they were placed under the discipline of such a law, taking charge of all their actions, regulating their dealings with each other, their dealings with God, there was no possibility of their making any progress. But observe well what pains are taken to show that these restraints, these strict rules, these threats of punishment did not come from any mere love of power on God's part, any desire to

put forth His strength against His weak creatures, much less from any spite or cruelty in His feeling towards them, but solely from His anxious care to make them a great and holy people. Before a word is said about the Law, before God shows Himself as a strict ruler who will have His commands obeyed, He first lets Himself be seen only as a Saviour and Deliverer. He lays the foundation of all true knowledge of Himself in that. For fear they should forget or mistake the lesson, He repeats it in the most distinct words just before He begins to utter His commandments. 'I, who now speak to thee and am about to tell thee what thou must not do on pain of my displeasure, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.' Observe also what care is taken that they should not suppose His demand for their obedience and worship to come from any petty greediness after honour such as a man might show, and that they should not expect Him to be indifferent how they treated each other provided they give Him His due tribute of worship and reverence and Sabbath-keeping. Both these natural mistakes are guarded against beforehand. In six out of the ten commandments it is the rights of men, not the rights of God, that are protected. We saw last Sunday how at the Fall estrangement from God was immediately followed by estrangement among men, how before the flood the corruption of mankind before God is mentioned along with their violence against each other. It is the same here and all through the Bible. In the divine law the duty to

God and the duty to our neighbour stand side by side for ever. We are warned, on the one hand, against a religion which loses itself in mere religiousness, and neglects the common duties of life: we are warned, on the other hand, against the empty dream which deceives so many, that it is enough to be content with justice and kindliness to our fellow creatures, while we render no homage to God in His own name and for His own sake, and remain strangers to His love and fear.

The Ten Commandments form but a very small part of the Law; but they are the part which concerns us far the most. The other precepts are rules for the guidance of a particular people at a particular time. After a while many of them seemed to have dropped into disuse: the people, in fact, outgrew them; they lost their original use, and became a mere burden too heavy to bear. But at first they were needed. When a people is in a young, unformed state, above all, when it is so disorderly and wilful as the children of Israel were in those days, nothing could serve but stiff rules to be obeyed, going even into the lesser matters of life. The laws given by Moses were chiefly intended to enforce just and merciful dealings among themselves, to keep them separate as a people set apart to God from the idol-worshipping and foully immoral nations around them, and in a great many different ways to lay down rules for the outward service of God. The people were not to invent for themselves ways of doing Him homage which they would be apt to regard as bribes to His majesty. They had simply to do as they

were bid, to offer to Him just what He commanded to be offered. But it was in offerings that their worship was chiefly to consist. Public prayer, such as makes up the greater part of our worship, was as yet unknown. They approached God through sacrifice—to yield up to Him a portion of the good things He had given them, to acknowledge in this practical way that they owed all to Him. This was the natural religious service of men who as yet had far more to do with acts than with words; and the *spirit* of that service remains the very Christian spirit. When we never tire of calling upon God to give, while we grudge every self-denial on our part for His sake, we are making no advance on the religion of those ancient Jews, we are but moving away from all true religion of any kind.

The tale of the wanderings of the children of Israel is a tale of murmurings and rebellions, followed by chastisements from God by which He strove to discipline and train them into a purer and more orderly state. The long continuance of the wanderings for the space of forty years was a punishment for the disobedience and threatenings against Moses and his brother Aaron, when the people were frightened at the report of the Promised Land brought back by the messengers, and refused to enter in. We keep up the memory of that time every morning service when we repeat God's warning in the Psalm, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long

was I grieved with this generation, and said, 'It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways.'" For indeed, brethren, these things were written for our learning. We often hear the earth compared to a wilderness. In some moods of our minds, more especially in advanced life, that appears to us a sadly true comparison; we are ready to cry out that we meet with little but barrenness and hopeless labour and suffering. In other moods, and at a younger age, we are angry when a world so full of brightness and enjoyment appears to be condemned in this kind of language. In either case let us at least remember that the true sense of the word comes to us from those wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness, about which we have been hearing to-day. For our life here is truly a passage, a journey. We have left Egypt behind. God has called us as His children out of the darkness of nature. We are not, we cannot be, as those who have never heard His name or Christ's name. We may hanker back after the thoughtless fleshy self-indulgence natural to those who have never learned that there is a God in heaven, and a law of God to be obeyed on earth; but we never can satisfy ourselves with such things. They too often after a while turn to ashes in the mouth. Before us lies the land of rest, the state in which the peace of God so rules our hearts that we carry with us a perpetual heaven. Between our Egypt behind and our Land of Promise before we are ever moving, sometimes backwards, sometimes forwards. But God calls on us to press ever forwards, holding the beginning of our confidence steadfast

unto the end. The hardening of heart through the deceitfulness of sin, which makes us, like dead stones, unable to feel the presence of the living God, the evil heart of unbelief and mistrust which cannot enter into His rest,—these are the things which mix thorns with the flowers of life and bitterness with its fruits, which prevent refreshment. We are on our way to God. Let us enjoy thankfully what He sends us by the way; but let us never forget whither we are bound, or allow ourselves to rest satisfied with anything short of Him who alone is our eternal home.

XVII

THE BIBLE. (v.) JOSHUA TO DAVID

"And David perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake."—2 *Samuel* v. 12.

We have now gone over the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, as they are called, or the Law. We have watched the Jews passing through the first stages of their growth into a people. Two great names have stood out above the rest, worthy to stand for ever among the chief of those which ought to be remembered and honoured to the end of time, the names of Abraham and Moses. All mankind, and we all among the rest, have every reason for gratitude to those two ancient men, for the services which they rendered to their own people were rendered to a seed in whom all nations of the earth were to be blessed and have been blessed.

In Abraham, the best-marked figure of the book of Genesis, the first forefather of the Jewish people, we saw the Friend of God, the lonely man going

forth into the unknown world in simple and sheer reliance on a Lord whom he could not see. In Moses, whose words and deeds fill the four later books, the lawgiver and leader of the Jewish people, we saw the Prophet of God, the receiver of a message not for himself only but for his whole nation.

These were the leading men. What about the great unnamed, almost unnumbered people? We saw their early beginnings in Isaac and Jacob and Jacob's twelve sons, their passage into the rich and civilized old land of Egypt. We lost sight of them there four hundred years while they were undergoing a discipline which should fit them for growing on to more and more in the years to come. At the end of the time we saw them toiling and groaning under the yoke of cruel Egyptian masters, their delivery in the name of the Lord their God by the hand of Moses, their march forth into the wilderness, their receiving from God, on the holy mount of Sinai, a Law which was to rule them and restrain them and make them into a people indeed by teaching them how to obey, their wandering on still in the wilderness for forty years as a punishment for their rebellious wanderings, and at last their second arrival at the edge of the Promised Land. Then the first stage was done. The wandering in strange lands was over, the settled life in a home of their own was to begin.

Thus far Moses had brought them. He was to go no further. He too had sinned in the wilderness and was not allowed to enter himself into the land of so many expectations. He went up into a

mountain and looked far and wide over the new world on which they were to enter without him, and there he died. His work was done. When his wandering was ended, his life was ended too, and he entered into a different rest. Another took his place. That other was Joshua the son of Nun. From him the sixth book of the Bible, the book of Joshua, takes its name. The story of that book is the story of the taking possession of the Promised Land under the guidance of Joshua. He, we are told, "was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the Lord commanded Moses." They crossed the river Jordan, that sacred river of which we hear so often in the Bible, and then began the advance by which one part of the land after the other was occupied. For we must not suppose that the country given to the Jews was empty, or filled only with wild beasts. One of its names is the land of Canaan, and various tribes of heathen called Canaanites were already in possession of it. These heathen had to be driven out before a resting-place could be found for the Jews; and so we hear much of the taking of strong cities and battles with mighty armies. This was the time spoken of in the well-known words, "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what thou hast done in their time of old: how thou hast driven out the heathen with thy hand and planted them (that is, Thy people) in; how thou hast destroyed the nations, and spread them wide abroad. For they gat not the land in possession through their own sword, neither

was it their own arm that helped them; but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them."

Such is the light in which it is best for us to regard the terrible events of that time. The conquest of Canaan was wrought out by slaughter, and it is not easy for us who live in happier times to know what to think about those deeds of blood. Thus much however at least we may see, that God speaks to men according as they are able to receive His teaching. He does not go greatly beyond their powers of feeling and understanding. To those who can comprehend only in part He speaks in part; and there are lessons true and valuable at their own time which at a later time it is dangerous to follow too closely. The world under its great patient heavenly Teacher has learnt much since the days when the Jews entered into Canaan. To us God commands the mercy and love which all Christians profess to admire. For us to copy, or admire those who copy, the merciless destruction which they carried on against their enemies, would be wilful disobedience to His plainest will. It is a sad necessity to fight and slay at our country's bidding in ordinary warfare; yet even there every true soldier holds his hands, and rejoices to spare an enemy when he can do so with a good conscience. Even this much of bloodshed is, we trust, only for a while: it is our duty to pray and labour for the time when the cruel and jealous passions of men shall have so far been quieted that even just and rightful wars may cease. And already we have learned or are learning from

Christ and His apostles that the warfare of Christians against that which is unchristian is not to be carried on by violence. By persecuting in Christ's name, by using in defence of the truth any weapons but those of example and persuasion, we do injury to the cause of God ; we hinder, not hasten the true spiritual conquest of men's hearts and minds.

Yet it would be well for us if we could look upon ourselves as the soldiers of God as truly as the Israelites. They were never allowed to think that God was permitting them to follow their own desires in all these wars. Achan, who took for himself some of the spoil, was stoned to death by Joshua's order. The Canaanites were to be destroyed, not for spite, not for plunder, but lest they corrupt God's people with their filthy idolatry, and beguile them away from the service of the Holy One. And oh, let us be sure that God hates all evil things as utterly as ever He did in the old time, and that His true servants now and always must hate them likewise and never weary in seeking to destroy them. For this cause the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, appeared on earth that He might destroy the works of the devil. The warfare has to be waged within and without, against our own darling passions and against the misery and wickedness which we see around us. The manner of the warfare is changed ; but so long as anything opposes itself to God and His righteous kingdom, so long life cannot cease to be a battle.

The next book is the book of Judges. It carries us on a further stage in the history. Joshua dies, and the advance of Jewish conquest comes to a

stand-still. For many generations, no one can say how many, there is a time of disorder and confusion. Scattered remnants of the Israelites continue in the land, and by their neighbourhood the children of Israel are tempted into sin and forgetfulness of God. They fall under the yoke of various oppressors. The most dangerous of these were the powerful nation who dwelt between them and the sea-coast, the nation of the Philistines. Then from time to time God raises up a mighty chief who brings back some sort of order into the wild lawlessness of his people, and enables them to shake off for a while the grasp of their enemies. These different chiefs are called judges, and give their title to the book. Four of them are specially named in the Epistle to the Hebrews for the divine faith which enabled them to carry on an unequal struggle against powerful oppressors. These are Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah. The story of their deeds is full of life and interest. We cannot look upon them for the most part as men of great holiness of life or purity of religion. But they had a rough work to do and they did it manfully. Not only were their labours made to serve a great purpose, not only were they instruments in the hands of God. They *knew* and *felt* that they were His instruments; and whatever of dark and earthly character may have been mingled in their life, they suffered and strove in His name for the cause of His people with a zeal which we might envy in these lukewarm days.

After the book of Judges comes the book of Ruth. Every one likes to read that beautiful story; but it

must not detain us long now. The chief point which concerns us is one that we might easily miss, though it is hinted at in the first chapter of St. Matthew. The last verses are the key to the whole book. The son of Boaz and Ruth was the forefather of King David and so of our Lord Himself. That highly honoured Ruth was not of Jewish blood. She came from Moab, that foreign nation which was so often at war with Israel. In a later day St. Peter declared to the Jews, "The promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call," and even in that early time the example of Ruth proclaimed to all the people how they themselves owed everything, not to any accident of their birth, but to the calling of God in heaven, and that it was His will to call others besides themselves to share the glory which He had bestowed on them.

The only other books on which I propose to speak to-day, making up five altogether, are the two books of Samuel. Their fifty-five chapters carry us over no great length of years, over not much more than a long life-time. Three famous names fill the two books—Samuel, Saul, David. One mournful verse marks the last few chapters of the book of Judges, occurring wholly or in part several times: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." The books of Samuel describe how that state of things passed away, and by degrees the kingdom was set up, first in a king after the people's own heart, then in a king after God's own heart. Not till that late time, till

the very reign of David himself, was the work ended which Joshua began, the conquest of the land was complete, and the people entered on the perfect enjoyment of God's promises.

But we must first consider the earlier steps. In the opening chapters we see the hopeless miserable state of the land. There was no one to lead the way to a noble life. The people had sunk into ungodliness and evil doing. The memory of God and His service was just faintly kept up at the holy tabernacle or tent which had been the outward sign of God's dwelling among His people while they journeyed through the wilderness. We can see the harmless but feeble old priest, Eli, too sinfully good-natured to restrain his wicked sons, serving God himself, but powerless to stir up any right spirit around him. Then we see the young child set apart by his parents to the Lord, ministering before Eli, waked by the voice of the Lord in the stillness of the night and sent with a message of melancholy prophecy and rebuke to Eli his master. That is the beginning. In the face and voice of that holy child we feel the dawning of a new and better day. He grows up. The Lord, we are told, was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground, and all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba, from the furthest north to the furthest south, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.

A few chapters later we read, "Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life." The judges of the wild time before him had been rough soldiers. Here now was a judge who was also a prophet, renewing

the memory of that Moses whose name was linked with all their highest recollections of the past. There were perhaps no very marked events of his long rule, nothing, that is, which would make a striking story. His influence seems to have been of that quiet but never ceasing kind, the effect of which is hardly noticed till afterwards. He lived to prepare the way for that which should come after him.

In Samuel's old age the elders of Israel came to him asking him to make them a king like the nations round about. There is no reason to think that it was against God's will for them to have a king sooner or later; but the temper in which they asked for it now was displeasing to Him. It showed that they did not believe Him to be really ruling over them, because they could not see Him. It betrayed a wish for a mighty captain to lead them to battle rather than a just judge between man and man, a restrainer of tyrannous great men, a friend of oppressed humble men. Here came an ever memorable lesson of the meaning of God's judgments. This sin of theirs He could not but punish. But why did He punish it? Was it to take revenge for their neglect of Him? No, it was that they might repent of their sin and see the folly of it and cast it away. And there was no way to bring this about so sure as the letting them have their way. Then by experience they would find out what true government contains.

So they were allowed to have the king they desired. Saul, a mighty man of power, handsome and tall, was anointed by Samuel in the Lord's

name, and proclaimed king over Israel. His whole story is most touching to read from its mixture of worthy purposes and paltry actions. There is in him no great deliberate wickedness. It always seems as if he might so easily have grown strong in goodness. But his course is a downward course. With all our interest in him, we feel him to be a poor and worthless king, indulging his people just when he ought to have restrained them, wholly unable at last to save them from the Philistine yoke.

In the last years of his life his story is intertwined with that of David. After one of his foolish acts of perverse disobedience, Samuel is sent to anoint another king. The youngest of Jesse's seven sons, who was busy feeding sheep, is chosen out by the Divine command, because, unlike the foolish elders of Israel, the Lord looketh on the heart, not on the outward appearance. This young shepherd was David. Soon after, he slays the giant Goliath with a pebble from his sling, and excites the jealousy of Saul by the praise which he receives. Presently to save his life from Saul's attacks he has to flee away and live the life of an outlaw ; yet ever in that banishment from the ordinary ways of civilized men, keeping up a high level of justice and honour, and generously sparing Saul's life when he had the power to take it. At length Saul is killed in battle with the Philistines, and with him his son Jonathan, David's dearest friend : and David pours forth his sorrow for father and son together.

This was the worthy beginning of David's reign, which fills the second book of Samuel. The spirit

of the whole is expressed in the words of the text, "David perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake." The growth of the people was complete at last, the kingdom was duly established, and the mark of a true godly kingdom was upon it, for the king reigned not for his own good but for his people's good. The earthly king's government was a true image of the heavenly king's government. A heart like the heart of God was beating in the breast of him who sat on the throne of Israel. His justice, his self-devotion were worthy to teach men the true mind of their Lord in heaven. Two things about David I pass over now. His grievous wrong-doing will require a few words next time. His psalms we shall have to consider later on, when the book of Psalms is before us. What concerns us to-day is his place in Jewish history with reference to what has gone before, his character as the crown and head of Israel. In him the history of the Old Testament reaches its highest point. No name that we have not yet touched is equal to his till we come to Christ Himself, called in the first verse of the New Testament the Son of David and Son of Abraham. By that name He was welcomed in shouts of triumph as He entered Jerusalem, when the people cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord." By that name He was beseechingly implored by the blind and wretched, and we too now repeat their cry so rich in meaning, when week by week we pray, "O Son of David, have mercy on us!"

XVIII

THE BIBLE. (VI.) THE KINGS, THE CAPTIVITY, AND THE RETURN

"For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth."—*Isaiah* lxii. 1.

Last Sunday we considered the second five books of the Old Testament: the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and Samuel. They conducted us through all the early times of the stay of the Jews in their own land and their complete growth into a people. We saw how they entered the land under the guidance of Joshua after the death of Moses, how they took many cities of the Canaanites and destroyed the inhabitants, and established themselves in the midst, the whole land being portioned out among the different tribes descended from the sons of Jacob. In the book of Judges we saw the rough and unsettled state in which they continued for many generations, helped forward now and then by mighty men called judges, who rose up to lead them against their

various enemies, and at times to bring their own irregularities under something like order and government. Next we saw the young child Samuel in the tabernacle by the side of the old priest Eli, and then growing up into a judge of a higher and better sort; a judge who was also a prophet, who helped to draw the people together in God's name, and spoke to them the words of God. Lastly we saw this last of the judges giving place to the kings, anointing them himself before the Lord to their great office; first, Saul, the king after the people's own heart, the tall and stately soldier whom they rejoiced to have over them to lead them against their enemies the Philistines, but who without any great wickedness only dragged them down lower and lower by indulgence to their fancies and his own, and allowed them to fall a prey to their enemies; and then, as their second king, David, the king after God's own heart. We saw him chosen out by Samuel when he was a shepherd boy, persecuted by Saul from jealousy of the honour paid to him as the slayer of the giant Goliath, upholding honour and justice while living as an outlaw among outlaws, sparing his persecutor's life when he had it in his power, mourning for his persecutor's death, and at last himself becoming a king of the noblest kind, one who lived for the good of his people, and governed them in fearless righteousness. Thus the people had in the end reached their full growth, and all that was best in them shone forth in their head and king. That later suffering King of the Jews, who was also to be King of the whole earth, whom we call our Lord, was hailed in the days of

His earthly life as the Son of David, and is still worshipped by the whole Church throughout the world under the same name.

Unhappily there was a worm in the bud of all this greatness both of king and of people. Both had reached a height from which it seemed impossible to sink down. But let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. The wonderful beauty and nobleness of character which rose higher and higher through the various buffetings and troubles of David's youth and early manhood, and which brought such blessings to his people after he had become king, was after all not strong enough to stand fast to the end against the temptations of good fortune and the power to do whatever he would. This pattern king, the man after God's own heart, condescended to adultery and murder. Most sincerely, most bitterly, he repented the sin: the prophet's word convinced him in a moment that he, the ruler and example of his people, had been guilty of that miserable baseness which it had been his pride all his life to scorn and hate in others. When he humbled himself before the King in heaven, God forgave him his disloyalty; but the punishment had still to be borne. He was hunted out of his city by his own favourite son, Absalom, and made to taste once more in his old age with tenfold bitterness the hardships and dangers of his youth. He came back at last a broken and saddened man, and there is a shadow over all the rest of his reign. That which to him had been punishment had been sin in the people. Their mad wilfulness in following Absalom was a dark sign, it

boded ill for the days to come. But for the present all things seemed to go well.

We enter to-day on a new time, the time of the kings after David. In a very few pages we read the story of four hundred years. The two books of Kings, after describing the last months of David's life, are taken up with an account of all the kings that came after him, and with the doings of the people so long as they remained in their own land. The books of Chronicles go no further. They repeat the same history in a shorter form, sometimes telling over again the same events, at other times bringing in fresh matter. They begin with a long account of the families of the Jews, and then go on with what happened after the death of Saul. The first book of Chronicles runs side by side with the second book of Samuel, with which we ended last Sunday, and the second book of Chronicles with both the books of Kings with which we begin to-day.

We have had one great king of the Jews, David himself. We come now to another great king of the Jews, a son of David, Solomon. Each reign has a character of its own: each is in its own way an image of the everlasting kingdom of Christ Himself. "Thou has girded me with strength of battle" is the thanksgiving of David: he was a man of war, a conqueror. Solomon in coming after him succeeded to a happier inheritance: he was a prince of peace. David is the pattern of the righteous king, Solomon of the wise king. Solomon reigned over a great empire. The kings of neighbouring peoples were glad to do him honour. The Jews were never

masters of so wide an extent of land before or after as in his days. Trade and commerce flourished. No outward mark of peaceful prosperity was wanting. The king himself began his reign in a spirit which promised well for the coming time. He asked God neither for long life nor for riches nor for victory over his enemies; but for a wise and understanding heart to discern between good and bad, that he might be able to do true justice among so great a people; and immediately the wisdom given in answer to his prayer was put to a sore trial, and proved itself equal to the need; and all Israel, we are told, feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do judgment.

This is the first great mark of Solomon's reign. The ruler of the people is also the wisest of the people. The second mark is of another kind; we must attend to it well, if we would understand the rest of the Bible. It is the building of the temple. That we may see what the building of the temple meant, let us go back a little. You will remember that at the time when the children of Israel were journeying through the wilderness from Egypt to the Land of Promise, having meanwhile no fixed resting-place, no roof over their heads at night, but dwelling in tents which they carried with them on the journey, they carried also in the midst one great tent called the Tabernacle. That was the tent of God, the mark of His constant presence. Without such a mark there was reason to fear that they might think of Him as far off from them. He wished them to know that He was in the midst of them. Wherever

they moved He moved too. Their many tents clustering round His one tent were a sign to them how He was the Lord of one and all, and how in drawing near to Him they were drawing near to each other. In that tabernacle He was worshipped. The religious services which He appointed were performed there. There too was the ark of the Covenant, the most sacred thing of all, in which were lodged various memorials of His great deliverance. He was a God of men, not a God of a mountain or a river. When they looked on His tabernacle sharing in all that befel their own tents, they were helped to believe in Him as indeed the God of Israel, bound up with their recollections of the past and their hopes for the future.

After they entered the Promised Land, the tabernacle of the wanderings did not lose its honour and holiness. While the conquest of the land was being carried out, the tabernacle went with the army ; and when the people settled down in their own homes it was fixed at Shiloh. When the ark was carried off by the Philistines, the tabernacle which had been as an outer covering to the ark came to be less thought of. In the days of Samuel, Saul, and David, it rested at different places, and at last at Gibeon, while David made a new tabernacle for the ark in his own new city of Jerusalem. It was impossible that both tabernacles should continue to stand, and David proposed in place of either to build at Jerusalem a fixed temple, a house of God instead of a tent of God. It was indeed a time to be remembered in the history of Israel. Till then the land

had had no capital, as we call it, no great mother city, to give the middle point for all the people. Think what England would be without London, and you can have some slight notion of the change made when David took the old heathen city of Jerusalem and made it the head city, the middle place of his kingdom. Then first, as I said before, the people was fully grown. Their divisions were healed; they were joined for a while as one man. Their rest in the land of rest till now had been broken by having to struggle with enemies within it. Now it was become quite their own, and they could rest indeed in settled homes. The time was come for a glorious house of God to rise in the midst of the houses of men. "See now I dwell in a house of cedar," said King David to the prophet Nathan, "but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." He could not bear the thought that the place of God's presence should be lodged meanly, while he was lodged richly. But he was forbidden to build the temple himself. That, he was told, was for his son, and so when the peaceful Solomon was settled in his kingdom, he began to build the temple of the Lord. He knew, as he said, that the heaven of heavens cannot contain the Most High; yet he rightly prepared for Him a house set apart from all common uses, which should bear His name and be the sign of His presence, and he rightly poured forth upon this house of God all his riches to make it beautiful and wonderful to behold. That temple of Solomon, brethren, was the beginning of our churches. The temple holds the middle place in all the rest of the Bible, Old Testament and New

Testament. When Jerusalem was trodden down and destroyed in the days of the latest apostles, as our Lord had foretold, the temple, which stood on the same ground as Solomon's temple, was destroyed. God was henceforth to be worshipped no longer only at Jerusalem; He was to be known as the Lord of all nations. The only one temple henceforth was the temple which St. John in the Revelation saw opened in heaven; but there was the same need as ever for marking the presence of God among His people. Our churches are much more than temples. Christian worship is far better than any worship offered in the temple at Jerusalem, because it has in it more of the spirit and more of the understanding. Our churches are places where we ourselves meet to praise God together, to pray to Him together, to hold communion with Him together. But they are also *His* houses, *His* temples, signs that where we are dwelling, He is dwelling too.

The latter end of Solomon's reign is sad to think of. His many heathen wives turned away his heart after other gods. He had freely spent his riches in building a temple for the Lord, but he did not keep his own heart pure and true to the Lord: that divine temple he neglected. His sin no doubt spread far and wide among the people. The worship of idols came in once more in the very sight of the new temple. When he died, and his son Rehoboam became king, a day of reckoning followed. By his bad conduct as a ruler Rehoboam goaded a large part of the people into rebellion. Ten out of the twelve tribes, or, as we might say, counties, refused to

obey him and set up another king: only two remained faithful to him. Thus the one people of God was henceforth split into two kingdoms, sometimes at war with each other, nearly always separate, cursed with a divided worship, divided laws, a divided name. From this time the ten tribes are called the kingdom of Israel or Ephraim, the two tribes are called the kingdom of Judah.

It would be quite beside my purpose to repeat to you the story of the two kingdoms. I can only mark out for you the great turning-points of the Bible. Cut off from Jerusalem and the temple, the kingdom of Israel fell at once into idol worship. That and the sins which accompanied it stained the whole people from first to last. Yet great and true prophets were not wanting; and the deeds of Elijah and Elisha remind us that God did not forsake even those who were estranged from His holy place and from the kingly family of David. The story of the kingdom of Judah is sad enough likewise. Now and then, as in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah, a bright light seems to spring up, and then it fades away once more into the gloom of sin and forgetfulness of God. The end of both kingdoms is the same. Both become the victims of powerful foreign nations. The kingdom of Israel is destroyed by the Assyrians, who carry the people away into captivity. The kingdom of Judah, often threatened, often reduced to sore straits, lasts on three or four generations longer, and then its day of doom comes. Jerusalem is taken, and the people of Judah are dragged away as captives to Babylon. So end the

books of Kings and Chronicles. From that day to this no Jewish king has sat on David's throne. This is the carrying away into Babylon spoken of in the first chapter of St. Matthew as finishing the second of the three great spaces of time between Abraham and Christ. The first ends with David, the second ends here.

We know very little of what befel the people in the land of their captivity. Various prophecies and psalms, to which we must return another day, belong to this time, and show what was in the hearts of the best among them. But what happened to them can only be gleaned from a few chapters of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, and the book of Esther. All particulars I shall pass over. But observe two great facts. One is that for a considerable time there were Jews dwelling in the heart of a heathen kingdom, making their spiritual power felt there, and receiving back new lessons which they were to carry with them in after times. Another thing to be remembered is the lasting effect of this sore chastisement from God. Whatever their future sins might be, they had done with idol worship for ever.

The two books which follow the books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, tell us how that miserable captivity came to an end, at least for part of the people. They had become at last the servants of Cyrus, king of Persia, a wise and good ruler, whose own religion was the purest and best of all heathen religions. He is spoken of in the later chapters of Isaiah as the Lord's own anointed, the Lord's shepherd, who should perform all His pleasure. Thus

God was making Himself known in new ways, showing that other nations besides the Jews were cared for by Him, and that He delighted in the goodness even of those who were strangers to His covenant. So a step was being taken towards the great Christian doctrine, that God is no respecter of persons.

Cyrus sent forth the chief of the fathers of the two tribes of the kingdom of Judah to go back to their own land, and build the house of the Lord which was in Jerusalem. He sent back with them the vessels of gold and silver which had been carried away out of the temple. In this way a remnant of the people came back out of captivity. They had hindrances of all sorts in building the temple. But at last the work was done, and regulations made for keeping the people strictly separate from their heathen neighbours. So ends the history of the Old Testament. A few chapters of the prophets come a little later down, but only a little. Above four hundred years more were to pass before Christ should be born, and for that time we have only the books called the Apocrypha, a few chapters of which are read in church on saints' days: books full of excellent teaching mixed with some fables; well worth reading, but never to be put on a level with the Old and New Testaments. What we require to know about the Jews in the times before Christ came is sufficiently told us in the Old Testament itself. As I began by saying, the purpose of the whole Bible is to teach us the ways of God: whatever does not help towards that, we can do without knowing.

The story of the people who sprang from Jacob's sons begins with a deliverance out of bondage: the Lord God who gave them the law was He who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. Their story, so long as it belongs to the Old Testament, ends with a second deliverance from bondage, a deliverance carrying with it a message not of love only, like the first deliverance, but of forgiveness. For the bondage in Babylon was due to their sins; the deliverance from Babylon is a pledge that God's love is not quenched by sin, though sin compels it to take new forms. God's dealings with each separate soul among us are written large in His dealings with His ancient people. In his tender loving-kindness He brought them back chastened and purified from Babylon. Yet when they rejected His blessed Son He cast them out once more as homeless wanderers on the face of the earth. Yet not for ever, St. Paul bids us believe: the gifts and calling of God He never takes back. He goes unweariedly on, fashioning His creatures to His own high ends. He cannot cease to punish or to forgive so long as there is sin to be punished or forgiven. And why? Because His mercy endureth for ever, and He never forsakes the work of His own hands. "For Zion's sake he will not hold his peace, and for Jerusalem's sake he will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth."

XIX

THE BIBLE. (VII.) THE PROPHETS

"THEN the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth."—*Jeremiah* i. 4-9.

THE last time that I spoke to you about the Old Testament, we had before us those books which describe the history of the Jews from the end of David's reign till the return from Babylon. In the two books of Kings and the second book of Chronicles we had the events which befel the people in their own land under their own kings. In the book of Esther we had a single story out of the captivity. In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah we had the return from the captivity, and the means taken after the return to preserve the people of God in separate-

ness and purity. After these books, the last of those which are often called the historical books of the Old Testament, *i.e.* those which tell us about men's *doings* and God's teaching by what befel them, we come to a totally different set of books, which contain men's *sayings* and God's teaching by the *truth* which they contain. I do not mean that the first set of books has in it nothing but doings, and the second nothing but sayings. The book of Deuteronomy, for instance, is in most parts more like a sermon than a story. And in the books to which we are now coming we shall find here and there chapters which are nothing but story. Still, on the whole, the distinction between the two sets of books is well kept up, and you will find it a real help to yourselves in reading the Old Testament to bear it in mind. In the books from Genesis to Nehemiah we have the *works* of God and man; in the books from Job to Malachi we have the *words* of God and man.

The books which still remain for us to consider belong to two great divisions. First come five called in our English Bible Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Solomon's Song. Then come seventeen called the Books of the Prophets. Up to this time I have been able to keep strictly to the order of books as we find them in the Bible. But to-day I shall venture to change the order a little, keeping the five books which follow Nehemiah for another time, and taking first the books of the prophets. There are two reasons for doing this. One is that the books of the prophets are more closely connected with the history of the kings and of the captivity with which

we were last occupied than even the Psalms and Proverbs are with David and Solomon. The other is that some of the lessons of the prophets have a special fitness for to-day, the last Sunday before Good Friday, and at the same time the last Sunday before Easter Day.

It is particularly important to see the connexion between the books of the prophets and the events which befel the Jews under the kings and after the two kingdoms had come to an end, because otherwise it is not possible to understand more than a small part of the prophecies. The prophets were raised up by God chiefly at times of great need to speak to His people the words which just at that moment it was especially necessary for them to hear. They were not men who lived away from their countrymen and brought messages out of the air, as it were; messages that might just as well have been delivered at any time, and which would be equally suitable to all people under all circumstances. They were men born and bred in the midst of the people, mixing with the people in all the affairs of their lives, suffering with the people in their sufferings, rejoicing with the people in their deliverances and turns of good fortune, feeling the burden of the people's sins as their own, eagerly embracing God's great mercy and forgiveness for themselves as sinners along with the rest of the people. Their whole minds were thus fashioned by all the changes within and without, the hopes and fears, the troubles and the blessings, which were rising and falling around them. Everything that came near them entered more deeply into their hearts than

into any hearts, left more lasting traces there, and kindled more powerful and active feelings. Thus the prophecy and the story fit into each other, as it were, because the one grew out of the other, and was intended in its turn to tell upon the other. The story, as given us in the books of Kings and Chronicles, for instance, is so short that we are not always able to trace its bearing upon the prophecy. But we ought never to forget that there *was once* a story belonging to *every* prophecy: and thus it is that the prophecies are still well suited to our own story, able to teach us to understand what has befallen us in our past lives, and able so to enlighten us as to what lies still before us.

For there is another side to the matter. The prophets were not only the men who shared most deeply in all that befel the people. They were also the men through whom God spoke to the people. This indeed is just what makes them prophets. A prophet in the strictest sense of the word is simply God's spokesman to men. It does not follow from this that the words are not his own too. It is not as though God had written down in the prophet's mind a particular set of words which he has nothing to do but read off as if he were reading a book aloud. The words are his own, nay, the thoughts are his own: only somehow within and behind them all is the Spirit of God, raising and purifying all the powers of his spirit. The voice of God and the voice of man are thus in a manner there together; we cannot tell the one from the other; the more completely the voice comes from the innermost depths of the

man, the more completely is it also the voice of God.

But in what way does the influence of the Spirit of God show itself in the prophets? First, in their tracing the happiness and the misery of men to the true roots, their love of good or their love of evil, their trust in God and keeping of His holy law, or their forgetfulness of Him and sinning against His commandments. We find in the prophets no fanciful and forced contempt for prosperity or misfortune, for any of the enjoyments of life or the miseries of life. They do not pretend to say that these ought not to be rejoiced in, or those felt as sore trials. But they do teach most plainly that the people or the man whose heart is set first on God and His blessed will is in the right way, and has a peace and joy which nothing can destroy. And they teach, on the other hand, that the people or the man who leaves God out of his thoughts and follows nothing but his own pleasure or pride or advantage is in the wrong way, however he may seem to prosper, and has within him a running stream of bitterness which poisons everything that he tastes.

This is one of the great lessons taught by the prophets; but it is one taught also by all true and wise preachers in all ages. There is another much more rare, which is found more remarkably still in the prophetic books of the Old Testament; and that is the necessity of looking backwards and forwards if we would see our present way aright. "I stand continually upon the watchtower" says Isaiah in one place. This is just what the prophets are always

doing. They are standing as it were on watchtowers, on places rising high above the level of ordinary life, from which they can look over a great breadth of country in all directions. Every one knows how much we are deceived by the mere nearness of things, when we cannot see more than a few things at once. Small things appear great; everything is seen only on one side. If we look back after we have gone on a little distance, we are surprised to see how different the same object looks now from what it did a little while ago. Now this is just what is happening to us every day in the serious affairs of life. We forget to look backward, we forget the experience which all looking back teaches, we are taken up with what is just before us, and we let ourselves be tricked by all its deceitful appearances. We live only for the moment.

Yet this is the destruction of all true and divine life. Man is man because he is a being looking before and after, one who makes full use of memory and of foresight, that he may order his life not in little single fragments but as one great whole, worthy of a creature permitted to understand and to carry out in part the counsels of the Most High God. The great work of the prophets of the Jews was to be ever rousing the Jews to a recollection of this their high calling ; to be renewing in their minds the memory of their own lives and of the life of the people before they were born, explaining to them God's dealings with their forefathers, and helping them to see where they were themselves now standing. This was their work as towards the past. It

was a not less necessary work to lead the people to keep the future ever in view. The Jews were above all nations, as I have said on former occasions, the people of hope: *i.e.* hope in the future was a leading thought in the minds of all their best and greatest men. The looking forward to the Promised Land in their early days was a sign of that reaching ever onwards which was never wholly to depart from the people in later days. The foundation of the hope was in the promises of God. Where faith in Him died away, the hope unavoidably died away too. No depth of misery appeared too great for Him to bring to an end, as He had brought the Egyptian bondage to an end. No depth even of sin appeared to kill His promises, though it might render their fulfilment far far distant, since the Holy One could never be satisfied with continuance in unholiness.

In this way the prophets who were the spokesmen of God were also distinguished by the keen and true sight with which they looked into the future, and the eagerness with which they spread forth before the eyes of the people their visions of the future. Their prophecies are not in the least like the pretended forecasts of fortune-tellers, not mere readings of a story of things to come just like readings of a story of things already past. What they did was to cast upon the future the light which came from so much of God's everlasting counsels as He had revealed to them through the past and the present. "In thy light shall we see light" was the leading thought of their minds. Even the darkness which covers all the time not yet born is not wholly dark to those who

have the light which comes from knowing God's ways. But once more let me repeat, their great task, as they looked forth from their watchtowers, was to raise the people by turning the people's own eyes steadily forwards. For us men, God and the future are linked together in a wonderful union. In this stage of the world it is difficult, almost impossible, to look up constantly to God without the help given by looking ever forward and forward to the glory which shall be revealed. And it is equally difficult not to be sunk in the cares and interests of the moment, but to have an eye without ceasing to the far-off life of ourselves and of our race, without hearty converse with Him who is the Lord of all the ages. To keep down the fears which spring from a knowledge of the evil in ourselves and the evil in the world we need the ever renewed assurance that His counsel shall stand, and that He will do all His pleasure.

I have dwelt at some length upon the office of the Jewish prophets in general, because this is the master key to the understanding of all their different books. If these thoughts are impressed on your minds, it will not be necessary to go minutely into the particular characters of each. Still it is most important to notice that they have each a distinct character, and to observe how they were affected by the great changes which befel the people.

When you read the books of Kings and Chronicles, you will see many prophets mentioned there from whom we possess no written prophecies. The fact is that long written prophecies, such as make up our

books of the prophets, belong only to the later times. The earlier prophets wholly or chiefly spoke in short and simple messages, valuable for their own day, but not rising to the far-reaching wisdom of such men as Isaiah. The beginnings of prophecy go a long way back in the history. We have already seen that Moses, the leader of the people on their first going forth from Egypt, was a prophet; and so was Samuel, the leader and judge who prepared the way for their being governed by kings. Nathan, who boldly rebuked King David for his great sin, was a prophet likewise, and all his words have a true prophetic sound. Afterwards we hear of various sayings and doings of not a few prophets, and it is evident that there were many more of whom no record has come down to us. They were not confined to the kingdom of Judah where Jerusalem was, and the holy temple of God, and the true worship of God, and the kingly family of David. After the miserable separation in the days of Rehoboam, about which we heard last time, when ten of the tribes were split off and formed a new half-idolatrous kingdom of their own, the kingdom of Israel or Ephraim, God raised up prophets there as well as in Judah. Indeed, I suppose the most lively picture of a prophet which occurs to our minds is that of Elijah, the rugged prophet of Israel, who stood forth to rebuke the idolatries of king Ahab and his queen Jezebel.

The prophecies of Joel were called forth by a terrible calamity. The land had suffered much from inroads of the heathen, much from a long drought, but most of all from several visitations of locusts,

large insects like grasshoppers, which devour a whole crop in a few hours, and leave wide spaces of country bare without a blade of green. Joel invites the stricken and starving people to humble themselves before the Lord, and then looks forward to a time when the Spirit of the Lord shall be poured out upon all flesh, and His love and favour to His people shall be known before the world. Here we have the simplest form of written prophecy. Prophecies of the same kind, but with a stronger feeling that the people of God were not less but more guilty than others when they sinned against God, make up the book of Amos, the herdman and gatherer of sycamore fruit, as he calls himself, who came forth from his country home to declare the word of the Lord, and boldly faced the king's anger. In Hosea we have a striking instance of the way in which the life of the prophet himself was used by God as part of His teaching. But it would take too long to go through all the prophets. The marvellous words of Isaiah in some of the early chapters were called out by a great danger in the reign of Hezekiah, when the overwhelming army of the Assyrians was threatening to destroy Judah, as they had destroyed Israel a few years before. In Jeremiah and Ezekiel we are brought to the miseries of the last days of Judah, when the cup was at length full, and after great troubles within the city the Babylonians were allowed to carry the people into captivity. In the book of Daniel, which is in many respects unlike any of the other prophecies, we are made to feel how even in captivity the people were still the people of God,

compelling in His name the respect of their heathen conquerors, and, on the other hand, enabled to see that all the nations of the earth were in God's hand, and that He had a work for each of them to do in His own due time. Then in the later chapters of Isaiah, the greatest and loftiest part of all Old Testament prophecy, we see the renewal of better times; and the hope of the return from captivity broadens out into a vision of new glory for Israel, spreading light over the whole world. And lastly, in Haggai and Zechariah, and a little later in Malachi, we are brought among the returning Jews themselves, the rebuilding of the ruined temple, and at last the fresh growth of sins which called for God to come down as a consuming fire to purify His people from their dross. They are bidden to remember the Law of Moses the first prophet, and are told that Elijah the fearless prophet of Israel shall come once more to prepare the way of the Lord, and so with a mingled voice of prophets early and late, and a renewal of the Law itself, the Old Testament ends.

Thus far it might seem as if the great promises of God to Israel had closed in failure. But deep in the heart of prophecy a new thought had meanwhile long been growing. The hopes of deliverance by degrees came together into the hope of a deliverer, a true conqueror and king whom God should send. Then when it became clearer that the people was its own worst enemy, and that deliverance from locusts, and plagues, and earthquakes, and foreign armies, was of little avail while sin had the mastery, it was seen likewise that the deliverer must be one who suffered

with his people, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, who felt the people's sins as his own, and bore on his own shoulders the iniquity of all. How that expectation was fulfilled, we shall hear on Good Friday.

But again, it was mixed with brighter hopes than Israel had known before. In the terrible captivity Israel had seemed to go down into death; and the return from captivity was like a return out of death, a life restored to dry bones, which hinted an assurance that after all death need not be the last thing, but that life might come once again where death had seemed to prevail. How that expectation was fulfilled, we shall hear on Easter Day.

The opposite feelings of passionate grief and exulting hope, which strive for the mastery in Old Testament prophecy, meet together in the coming week, which is filled with the Saviour's sorrows and ends on the eve of His joyful resurrection. But remember, brethren, to us God has given not a prophecy only but a gospel. He has not merely taught us to ask and to hope. He has given, and He has fulfilled. Our faith is that Christ *has* died, and Christ *has* risen.

XX

THE BIBLE. (VIII.) JOB, PSALMS, PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES

"WHEN he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder; then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."—*Job* xxviii. 26-28.

ON the last Sunday before Easter we entered on the second half of the Old Testament, that part of it which deals chiefly with the *words* of God, which words of God are also the words of men; as the earlier part described the *acts* of God, the ways in which His Providence ordered the *doings* of men. We took first the books of the prophets, and I tried to show you how needful it is in reading their prophecies to remember that they were first spoken in the midst of stirring times, of which we have a short account chiefly in the books of Kings and Chronicles. A prophet, we saw, is a man who speaks to other men in God's name and on God's behalf. But he is prepared for his office by entering more

strongly and deeply than other men into all that is going on around him. Whatever he speaks is coloured by the events, the thoughts, and the feelings of his own time, which take hold on his own heart. And again whatever he speaks is meant to tell upon his own people and his own time: when he warns or rebukes or encourages or inspires, it is of them and their needs that he is thinking. Yet his words have an abiding life in them, which makes them fit and profitable to be spoken to *us*, because the Spirit of God Himself is in them. This influence from above shows itself not merely in the way in which all the prophets insist on right and wrong, good and evil, as the one great distinction without which our life goes off into hopeless confusion and misery. It shows itself still more in the way in which they stand, as it were, on watchtowers, gazing far backward and far forward, teaching us to judge the little things close at hand by the light of God's great purposes, and never to allow the trifles of to-day, which look to us important now only because they are under our eyes, to make us forget the great eternal world to which we belong all the time. Lastly, the prophets lead us to see God and His kingdom in the future. By teaching us to fear and to hope, but above all to hope, beckoning us to look onward to the days which are still far before us, they lead our thoughts likewise to the heaven above us and to God the King of heaven. And again, by fixing our minds on Him and the treasures of wisdom and goodness which are hid in His counsels, they invite us to look beyond the little round of present things and

admit the coming ages among our beliefs and our desires.

These are some of the benefits which we may receive, if we will, more or less from all the prophets. They have likewise, as I told you, their different lessons, changing with the times for which they spoke and with the events of their own lives. The ups and downs of fortune which befel the Jewish people under its kings, then the carrying away into a strange land, and then the return of part of the people back to their own land, give rise to different bursts of prophecy. One particular thread of prophecy I noticed as having special interest for us by the way in which it prepares us for the New Testament. The hopes for the people take shape by degrees as hopes of a coming Deliverer. This expected Deliverer, who at last was known as the Christ or the Messiah, *i.e.* the Anointed One, was known better and better as time went on. In the sufferings of the captivity the prophets found out under the Spirit's teaching that *He* too must be a sufferer, one who shared all His people's sorrows and felt the burden of their sins as His own. But they were further taught to look beyond the time of suffering to the time of glory. The return of the people from the dust of captivity became an assurance that life is possible after death as well as before it. Thus those expectations were planted in the hearts of men which were fulfilled on the first Easter morning, when the true King of the Jews and of all mankind, who had passed through suffering and death down into the grave, rose once more from the dead, and

so led the way in the march of mankind back to God.

To-day we take a step backwards, not merely in the pages of our Bibles, but in the order of time. Parts of some of the books with which we have to do to-day may perhaps have been written as late as some of the later prophecies. But the names of David and Solomon belong in one sense or another to four out of these five books, and so we are carried back to those two great kings who stand at the beginning of the kingdom of the Jews, while it was yet in the first bloom of its power and glory. The names of the books which thus remain for us to consider are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Solomon's Song. On this last book I do not propose to say anything, for obvious reasons. A time may one day come when it will be understood why Solomon's Song has a place in our Bibles; but, as things now are, it can hardly be possible to speak of it from the pulpit with advantage.

We come first to the book of Job. This wonderful book hangs in the air, as it were, without mark of time and almost without mark of place. Job is set in the land of Uz, outside the land of Israel. He has no knowledge of tabernacle or temple or law or prophet; yet he has the faith of a Jew: he believes in the one Lord whom the Jews worshipped. There is nothing to fix at what time he is supposed to have lived. He is cut off from everything: he stands alone, alone facing God, and so his struggles are a true picture of the struggles which are likely to come to any man at any time in any place who is brought

into sore trials, and yet does not forget God. You will remember that we are now in a part of the Bible which has much more to do with words than with works. The story of Job is not like the story of David or of Elijah, such as we read in the earlier books: it is rather like one of the parables in the Gospels, such, for instance, as the parable of the rich man and the beggar. The doctrines of the book are the important part. All that is said to have happened to Job is only a framework put in to carry the doctrines.

What then are these doctrines? I have used the word 'doctrines' for want of a better, but it is not a very fit or satisfactory word here. The teaching of the book of Job comes out partly in questions, partly in answers to questions. We cannot pack the substance of the whole into a small space. The different parts are necessary to each other, even when they seem to contradict each other. Job, a man who is both prosperous and happy, enriched by God with every blessing that life can bring, yet not injured by his good fortune, but fearing God with all his heart, is stripped one by one of all his blessings. His cattle and his slaves, in those days the chief kind of riches, are carried off by robbers or struck dead by lightning. His sons and daughters are crushed to death beneath a falling house. In the midst of his poverty and desolation his own body is not spared: it is filled with a loathsome disease. His wife, instead of cheering him and encouraging him, mocks at him bitterly because he still trusts in God.

In the midst of his trouble three friends come to see him. They are full of real pity for him. Their

wish is to mourn with him and to comfort him. For a whole week they say nothing, but only sit down with him in sorrow. Then at last he breaks forth. He says nothing against God; but he wishes no longer to live since life has become so bitter, he feels it a curse to have been born. The friends reply with an appeal to the justice of God. They begin softly and kindly; but as he answers that their doctrines, however true they may be, do not heal his misery or show him the way out of his bewilderment, they wax hotter and hotter, and pour forth reproaches against him. The subject of the whole dispute is the meaning of sorrow and trouble and why God sends them. Probably every one in this church who is more than a child has at some time or other tried to see his way in the same difficulty. 'Do good, and thou shalt find good; do evil, and thou shalt find evil'; this is the first simple rough law. We express it more roughly still when we say that welldoing leads to happiness, and wrongdoing leads to misery. This is true, but it is not the whole truth. If it were the whole truth, we should never see any misfortune happening to a good man or any good fortune enjoyed by a wicked man. Yet we know that we do often see both these things; and so we may be sure we cannot have learned the whole of God's ways to man when we are satisfied to judge men solely by this rule. Yet this was what Job's friends did. They had their rule by heart, and had no scruple about applying it to the sufferer before them. Seeing him in misery, they thought that God must have sent the misery as a punishment for some

sins. They knew of no great sins to accuse him of, but they declared that he *must* have committed great sins, or God would never have so afflicted him. And when Job refuses to confess the truth of their accusations, they grow more angry and pronounce him guilty of self-righteousness.

And here let me point out one great mistake, which is commonly made by readers of the book of Job. It is often taken for granted that every word which we find there in every chapter is pure truth, no matter from whose lips it comes; and the speeches of the friends in particular are readily quoted, because they agree so well with what is supposed to be the religious and proper thing to say upon all occasions. But the fact is that even the truths which the friends utter become half-falsehoods in their mouths, and will be equally false in our mouths if we use them in the same reckless uncharitable way. Not the least useful lesson of the book of Job is that it is quite possible to be doing only the devil's work when we pride ourselves on being on the side of God and religion: there is a speaking for God, as Job bitterly complains, which is a wicked speaking, and a talking for Him which is a deceitful talking. On the other hand, Job's own words, honest and in the main true as they are, must still be taken as the words of a man in anguish who cannot see his way, and so is often led to speak wild words; who refuses to juggle himself into repeating what he cannot believe merely because he is told he ought to believe it; and yet who still feels that his own life and God's dealings with it are a terrible puzzle.

When at last God answers Job out of the whirlwind, he and his friends are alike put to silence. We are made to feel the folly and falsehood of pronouncing that the greatest sufferers must have been the greatest sinners (though indeed there ought to be little need of such teaching for Christians who have heard of the spotless Saviour's sufferings), and at the same time we are shown how little we poor short-sighted creatures can understand of the counsels of the mighty God. We are permitted to see at least one purpose of suffering. Job was tried and purified by what he endured. He came forth from his sorrows with a deeper and wiser faith in God than he had known before, and he received in the eyes of men the assurance of God's undiminished love and favour by being restored to more than his former good fortune. The sufferings which God sends are not a mark of His hatred or indifference: one reason at least why He sends them is to purify us and make us better and truer men.

The book of Psalms must be more familiar to us all than any other book of the Bible, from its use in church every Sunday. I have often had occasion to preach to you about different Psalms, and may have to do the same again. Still a few words will not be out of place now about the whole book. The Psalms taken altogether are often called the Psalms of David. It must not be supposed that they were all written by him. They come from all times between his days and those of the latest prophets. In the 137th Psalm, for instance, we have the sighs of the Jewish prisoners as they sat beside the waters of

Babylon and longed to be back in their own holy and beloved land. The mark of place and time which every one can observe in those words may be traced more faintly in some other Psalms. But David is *the* Psalmist. The fountain of devotion and praise to God which sprung forth with such power in his heart flowed on into the holy men of other generations who read and sang his eager words ; and for many a generation the Psalter or book of Psalms went on growing richer and fuller. Almost every thought which can enter the mind of a man communing with his God is there. Sometimes the tone is of bitter anguish, sometimes of bounding joy, often a mixture of both; but always the one assurance is there, that God can and will be the help of them that trust in Him and cry to Him. Many of the Psalms are the outpourings of lonely men, pleading with God as Job pleaded with Him. Others again are thanksgivings written for the temple services, meant like our best hymns to be regularly used by bodies of singers in the public worship of the people, praises of the Lord by the great congregation. This great variety of the Psalms gives them no small part of their value. They reach us in every mood of our hearts, and turn every thought into a prayer.

No change can be greater than when we pass from the Psalms to the Proverbs. The burning words of the righteous king, who was a fighter for the greater part of his life, give place to the calm maxims of the wise king whose long reign was a time of peace and trade and riches. Here too, as in the Psalms, the proverbs which Solomon himself

uttered became the pattern after which many proverbs were fashioned, and the book of Proverbs, as we have it, is a storehouse of the wise sayings of different generations. Their *wise* sayings—this is the mark of the whole book. A time had come in the history of the Jews when they might at last rest: the struggle to obtain complete mastery within their own land was over: what they had to do now was to dwell in it after a right and godly manner. Up to this time they had been always on guard, a kind of soldier life was a necessity. Now they were to live the life of citizens, to dwell with each other in a peaceable and orderly way, and throw into common duties the whole strength which till now had been in part required for defence against enemies. Simple homely morality had to be cultivated by old and young, rich and poor, parents and children, husbands and wives: and the great need of all minds was summed up in one word, 'wisdom.' The natural impulse of every one was, as it is now, to go off after this or that object of desire in shortsighted and reckless ways. Wisdom corrects this impulse by teaching us to fix our minds on lasting and distant things, so as not to be carried away by deceitful shows. Sometimes in the book of Proverbs the wisdom which teaches us seems to lose sight of God in the petty matters of our daily work. But it is a most needful lesson that the Bible declares these common things, which we are apt to pursue without thought of God, are the very field of our religion, and that in them we have to show whether we do indeed worship a holy and just God who will have us holy

and just like Himself. For again and again we are reminded that all lesser wisdoms meet together in one highest victorious wisdom, the beginning of which is the fear of the Lord.

Lastly, we come to the book of Ecclesiastes. It is put into the mouth of a king of Jerusalem, a son of David, *i.e.* Solomon. The writer of the book had no care to thrust himself forward. All that he had to say appeared to suit the character of the wise king, such as he might have become in his old age, after the ample experience of a long life upon the throne. It was a melancholy message that he had to deliver as what life had taught him. Job had been perplexed with misery; the preacher was perplexed with a less sharp but a commoner and perhaps even a more depressing thing, with vanity, disappointment, failure. To him life had promised much and seemed to perform little: it brought only vexation of spirit. Out of such an experience what lesson could spring? This, a humble lesson, yet a true and wise one. First, not to lose the blessings of the present by wasting ourselves in empty expectation of better things in store; but to prize what we have, and take heed that we do not throw away the true riches which lie hid within it. Next, to remember God, our Maker and our Judge, now at once, not by and bye but to-day, and find in Him and His law a refuge against the unsatisfyingness of all things beside. There are certain states of mind only too familiar to many among us in which our hearts can be better reached by such a message as this than by any other voice from above. But God forbid

that we should rest in such states of mind. We have come to the end of the Old Testament; but there is a New Testament waiting for us. God Himself leads us through the wilderness, makes us feel the world to be barren and dry, writes vanity of vanities upon our hopes and desires. But this He does that He may lead us at last into the heavenly Land of Promise, when we have learned that all life flows from Him, and then new life and brightness return to the things which only wearied us before. His Son's resurrection is the true answer to that sigh of vanity. It calls us, brethren, to walk in newness of life. It tells us that all things are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

XXI

THE BIBLE. (IX.) THE GOSPELS

"THE beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God."—*St. Mark* i. 1.

WE have now gone through the Old Testament and can understand in what sense, as the Epistle to the Hebrews told us, God at sundry times and in divers manners spoke to the fathers by the prophets. We have followed the Jewish people through manifold and great changes from their first beginnings in Abraham the Friend of God. We have seen how the Providence of God led them down into Egypt; how after 400 years, ending in cruel slavery, they were delivered by God by the hand of Moses; how they went forth, led by Moses the prophet and mouthpiece of God, and journeyed through the wilderness towards their own land; how they received from God through Moses at Mount Sinai a Holy Law, which was to restrain them and guide them in the right way, and make them a people indeed; how, because of their rebellious spirit, they

had to wander forty years in the wilderness, and at last entered into the Promised Land under the guidance, not of Moses, but of Joshua ; how they were permitted to conquer the heathen nations whom they found in the land, and take possession of their cities; how for many years of rough disorder they were governed from time to time only by rulers called judges, who led them against their enemies, and enforced some kind of justice amongst themselves ; how the last of these judges, Samuel, was set apart to God while yet a little child, and became a prophet as well as a judge, teaching the people from God as well as ruling them from God ; how he brought all the different parts of the people together, so that they learned to feel once more that they were truly one people, and began to crave for one king ; how this natural desire of theirs was mixed with want of faith in their unseen and heavenly King, and so Samuel was permitted to anoint first the tall warrior Saul, the king after their own heart; but then, when he only led them deeper into misfortune, another king was set over them, David the shepherd, the king after God's own heart, the faithful and righteous, though unhappily not the spotless, king ; how after him came his son Solomon, the wise king, who built the temple of the Lord, and carried the power and honour of Israel higher and wider than it has ever reached before or since; how after the glorious reigns of these two great kings, David and Solomon, there followed a dreadful division, when the one people of God was split into the two separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and Israel soon gave itself up to

the worship of idols. We saw how, after some generations, both kingdoms came to an end through conquering armies of foreigners, who carried first the people of Israel and then the people of Judah away into strange lands; how for all this the spirit of Judah was not broken, and the true people of God yet lived in the midst of captivity; how, when a favourable time came, they returned to their own land under the guidance of Ezra, built up the holy city and the temple of the Lord, and lived on without kings and without idols till the time of Christ.

In all this long and varied story we have seen the unfolding of God's counsels; the way in which He made preparation for yet greater events than any of these. Every step was a lesson about Himself and His dealings with men. The Friend of man; the God of a family, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the Deliverer from darkness and slavery; the Giver of a Holy Law; a jealous Ruler who will not suffer His laws to be broken, but takes vengeance on them that hate Him, yet rejoices to receive them back into favour; the Captain and Guide of His people in their wanderings and their fightings; the Judge and King of His people in their dealings with each other; the Giver of wisdom to them that need it; the Restorer from captivity and from death; the Holy One who delights in the praise and prayer of a worshipping people;—here we have the chief characters under which God has declared Himself for evermore to men in and through the story of the Jewish people.

Once more, in the latter part of the Old Testament, we have found Him speaking yet more

expressly and distinctly through the prophets. We have seen how they were raised up by Him to speak His words to His sinful or sorrowing people; to open their hearts to every thought and feeling of their brethren on the one hand, and to His own heavenly messages on the other; how they taught the people to look backwards and forwards, but chiefly forwards; to regard their own little doings as only a part of God's mighty plans, plans which, because God is good, must also be good likewise, and bring only evil to those who set themselves against good; how, in a word, they laboured in a thousand different ways to lift men out of their sin and misery by the mighty power of faith and of hope. Lastly, the other books of the Old Testament, which teach us more by words than by works, have shown us, in Job the bitter struggles of a sorely tried man to find out the meaning of God's afflictions, and the answer which God makes; in the Psalms the prayers and praises of many generations of lonely men or full congregations, beginning with the outpourings of David's own heart; in the Proverbs the maxims which are needed for a wise and right conduct of life, all leading down from and up to the fear of God; and in Ecclesiastes the needful lesson that God is to be found in the present as well as the past and the future, and that He is the one refuge against the weary sense of vanity and emptiness which is so apt to befal us in middle life.

To-day, in beginning the New Testament, we enter on a new world, and yet one which is the close and completion of the old world that has engaged us

for many weeks. Its character is expressed very clearly in those words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which I have so often quoted, "God hath spoken unto us by His Son." All through the New Testament the voice of God comes to us through the person of Jesus Christ. It is not that we have in Him a new God, in place of the old God whom the Jews worshipped. Our God is the same as theirs, but He makes Himself known to us in new ways; He bids us look on His Son, and through Him learn His own character.

The New Testament, like the Old, may be divided into two parts, the first made up of stories, God teaching chiefly by works; the second made up of letters and prophecies, God teaching chiefly by words. The Gospels and Acts of the Apostles form one part, the Epistles and the Revelation of St. John form the other. To-day I propose to speak only of the Gospels.

The very name at once calls for our attention. We all believe that we possess something called the gospel; we all by this time, I hope, know that the word means the Good News. In a certain way the name gospel has come to belong to the Christian faith in general, or to what are supposed to be its most important doctrines in particular. Now we may naturally ask, what has that meaning to do with the four first books of the New Testament? how can four stories be spoken of as if they were the same thing as a set of doctrines? The truth is, brethren, that the name belongs first and properly to the books; and the doctrines have only a lesser and

imperfect right to it. Strictly speaking, the earliest and simplest gospel was the message which Christ Himself declared and bid His apostles declare, that the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven was at hand; and it would be hard to find better words to express for us the pith of all the Gospels. All in their several ways, by everything which they tell us of Christ's doings and His sayings, point us to Him, and say to us, 'Look there, look on Jesus the Son of God and the Son of man, and see in Him the kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven brought near at hand. You are accustomed to think of God as far off in a distant world: you are accustomed to think of heaven as a distant place to be reached in some remote time, not before your earthly course is ended, perhaps not for ages afterwards. But you are wrong: look at Christ, and you will see that you are wrong. In Him God and heaven are brought very close to you, and you find yourselves already citizens of a real powerful kingdom, when you understand how He lived the life of God and of heaven upon earth."

For us then the true gospel is simply the life of Christ. We may, without impropriety, give the name gospel to any great truths which are established by His life; but His life itself is the pure, simple, original gospel. In speaking of His life I, of course, do not mean to leave out His death and resurrection: they are the most important and instructive parts of His whole earthly existence: to St. Paul they alone were sufficient to form a gospel. But I mean by the life of Christ all that is told of Him in these four books: how He was born, and grew up to manhood, and

taught and wrought miracles, and suffered, died, and was buried, and rose again from the dead. There are a great many sayings and discourses of Christ set down in the Bible. They are of course full of truth most necessary for our use: the words of Him that spake as never man spake should be treasured up by us and studied as words of life. But it would be a great mistake to suppose that they are themselves the gospel, or make even the more important part of the gospel. It is hardly too much to say that the sayings of Christ are nothing without His doings. Certainly we cannot rightly understand His sayings unless we study His doings. The sayings and the doings each help us to understand the other. Both alike are fruits of His nature and character and work, which are themselves the very gospel in the truest sense.

This is indeed a happy thought for those who do desire to take hold of God's holy gospel, but feel that they have not time or knowledge or understanding enough for the study of difficult doctrines. The gospel of gospels itself is, for all that, within their reach. They can read and see for themselves what Christ *was*; and that is *the* Good News. The picture which rises up before them as they read is a truer and better thing than any doctrines which can be reached by mere thinking. We must all have felt that a knowledge of the person and character of some one whom we had reason to admire had really greater power both to instruct us and to kindle us to a worthy life than any lessons of a preacher or a book. So too it is

with Christ. The power of the gospel is the power of the image of Christ Himself, in His divine yet most human goodness, to turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh and wake up a new life in dead spirits.

Properly then there is but one gospel, as there is but one Lord and Saviour. What we call the four Gospels are merely the one gospel seen from different sides and set in different lights. It is only in rapid and familiar speaking that we talk of the Gospel *of* St. Matthew. The more exact name is the Gospel according to St. Matthew; *i.e.* the gospel, the one gospel, in that particular shape in which it was understood and described by St. Matthew. So, when we speak of the four Gospels, this is really only for convenience of language: what we mean is the four books in which the one gospel is variously described.

There are various advantages in having Christ's life thus presented to us in four different ways. Not the least advantage is that we are thus led away from the mere books to the contents of the books. If there were only one story of Christ's life, we might be easily led into seeking in the book for a kind of benefit that no mere book can ever give. But now we see that the four books are only like different cases or vessels which contain the one precious jewel; and we are led to see that the one important thing for us is to know what Christ Himself was. Again, it is a great advantage to have the one life seen from different sides. It comes out clearer and, as we say, more lifelike, when we are

able to look at it in this way. There was some one particular character in Christ's nature or work which had the chief interest for each of the four writers. St. Matthew saw in Christ the king who fulfilled the hopes of the prophets and those humble Jews of later times who were taught by the books of the prophets. St. Mark saw in Him a true Son of God, one whose words and works were always true signs of God and God's kingdom. St. Luke saw in Him the fulfilment of the hopes of all nations, the sign that all mankind were now admitted to be true members of God's people. St. John saw in Him the eternal link between God and man, the light and life of men, the one perfect representation of God upon earth. Hence there are various sayings and doings of Christ which it did not concern one or the other evangelist to mention; and even when they tell the same tale, they tell it in different ways, drawing our attention to different points. The impression which we thus gain by reading all the four books is thus much fuller and richer than we could form in any other manner. Above all, we are led to discover that there is in truth no possibility of ever exhausting or coming to the end of the gospel of Christ. Whenever we approach it from new points of view, it sends forth new light. Its outer form contains within it endless riches of meaning which reward those who seek them patiently and humbly. The gospel which is so simple is also in another sense beyond all comparison manifold. There is no dark place in our own hearts or in the great bewildering world without us which may not

find a light upon it from something in that marvellous fourfold tale of Jesus of Nazareth.

But we must not forget what I said long ago, that both the Old and the New Testaments were written by Jews for Jews, and that the teaching of both is wrapped up in what befel the Jewish people. It would be a great mistake to imagine that we have done with the Jews because we have come into the more familiar world of Christ and His apostles. Do not suppose that you will ever understand much of what the gospel is meant to teach you if you put the Jews out of sight. Mark the very first words of the New Testament, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham." Abraham and David are with us still; they hang on to the skirts of our Blessed Lord; we cannot properly have Him if we neglect them. The title over His cross declared Him to be King of the Jews. We should have made a very different Christ from the Christ of the Bible, if we set to work to represent Him only as our own personal Saviour, and to pass over all that He was to the ancient people of God.

The life of the Jews as a people dwelling in their own land was drawing near its end when He was born. They had been wonderfully brought out of Egypt to the Land of Promise in the old old time. After many generations God had suffered them for their sins to be led away into captivity. Then once more He had brought them out with a yet more marvellous deliverance, and restored life to the dry and scattered bones. But a deeper and more deadly corruption stole over them. Once upon a time they

had worshipped false gods: now they worshipped the One True God in an unbelieving and godless spirit. The very heart of religion itself was diseased: it bore no fruit of love and service to God or man. Then, as we are taught in some of the parables, the Heavenly King sent as a last messenger His only begotten Son. But they hated Him and said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." They had lost the power of discerning the image of God when it came in its own natural beauty without the blaze of glory or the sound of trumpets. Unlike the later prophets they could not recognize a king who was also a man of sorrows, or a prophet who refused to astonish them with signs, and spoke and did only that which the work before Him required. Thus, as St. John says, "He came to his own, and his own received him not."

But the life of Christ was the first day of a new world as well as almost the last day of an old world. Outside the Jews stood other peoples less highly favoured by God, yet now become more worthy to be owned by Him. Christ's death and resurrection at last broke down the barrier. As St. Paul says, "Now in Christ Jesus we who some time were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." In the Gospels we have beginnings of this mighty change. To understand them rightly we must keep the recollection of Jew and Gentile constantly before our minds. We may, if we choose, treat it as a barren matter of knowledge, a thing which has nothing to do with ourselves or our own life. But, if we let the Bible itself teach us, those words Jew and Gentile

will lead us into the midst of the most awful and solemn thoughts which the mind of man can reach, the thoughts of a gospel refused on the one hand, accepted on the other. But high above all these differences stands the one Divine form of the Son of man, speaking as He spoke in the last days of His sojourn among mankind, "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth." That was the reward of His perfect obedience and sacrifice: that is the word of hope with which He cheers us on to tread in His blessed footsteps.

XXII

THE BIBLE. (X.) THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."—*Revelation* xxi. 14.

We began last Sunday to consider the New Testament. We saw its great mark to be this, that in it God speaks to us in His Son, thus putting the crown and finish to all that through long ages and in different ways He had spoken before. His speaking in the times of old had been about Himself and His kingdom, about men and the world only so far as they have to do with Him. It is the same still in the New Testament. Here too we are not taught to worship a new God, but the God of Abraham and Moses and David is made known to us more perfectly in the person of His Son.

We saw that the New Testament, like the Old, may be divided into the books which chiefly teach us by works, and the books which chiefly teach us by words; into stories of things that happened, and direct teaching by lessons; the Gospels and the Acts

of the Apostles making up the first part, and the Epistles and Revelation of St. John the second part: just as in the Old Testament we have first the long history from Genesis to Esther, and then Job, Psalms and the rest, and the books of the Prophets.

Our proper subject last Sunday was the Gospels, which are in truth the very heart of the New Testament, from which all the other books draw their life and power. I pointed out that these books tell us what the gospel really is,—not all the doctrines that we believe, still less a few chosen doctrines, but the simple message of good news that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, is close at hand, brought near to us in the life and death and rising again of Christ. The words of Christ are not by themselves the gospel, even the deeds of Christ are not by themselves the gospel; but the picture which His words and deeds, and especially His deeds, give of Him and of God's dealings with Him, this is the gospel. This one gospel, as we saw, is presented to us in four books, the Gospel *according to* St. Matthew, *i.e.* as understood and described by St. Matthew, the Gospel *according to* St. Mark, and the rest. Thus we are taught to look on through each of the four books at Him who is the one subject of them all, and we are enabled to see Him, as it were, from different sides and in different lights.

We go on to-day to the book called the Acts of the Apostles. The question at once arises, Why should we want to hear about the apostles? When we have had the words and deeds of the Master, we are inclined to think little of the words and deeds of the

servants. If God has spoken to us once for all in His Son, can we go further? Is it possible to have anything in the Bible after the Gospels which it is worth our while to hear? We must face these questions, brethren, if we want to understand the Acts of the Apostles and their use for us. I do not think that we half value the Gospels as we should do, or half understand how completely they rise above all the rest of the New Testament. But the truth is, the better we know their surpassing dignity and value, the more able shall we be to appreciate the excellence of the other books of the New Testament. If the Gospels were more highly prized, the Acts of the Apostles would not be so little read, or so little cared for as they are now.

There are two great purposes served by all the books of the New Testament which follow the Gospels. First, they are in their several ways a Divine explanation of the Gospels; they teach us what we ought to think of Christ, and of the light which He throws on God and God's kingdom. Secondly, they carry us gently onwards from the ascension of Christ into the common life of men. The gospel was not flung suddenly and nakedly into the midst of the world. Christ appointed apostles to carry on the work which He had begun, and through them He founded the Church, which was to carry on the same work when they were dead. We want for our guidance to know not only what Christ was, but what changes His coming began to make in the world. We are too much accustomed to think of Him as a long way off from us: we should find Him far nearer if we

approached Him through His apostles and through His Church.

The teaching which we receive through the apostles is threefold. In the Acts we have the teaching of their lives, what they did and what God did with them. In the Epistles we have the letters which they wrote to Churches or to single persons. In the Revelation of St. John we have the visions of prophecy which were vouchsafed to one of them. The book of their Acts, with which we are concerned to-day, manifestly carries on the story of the Gospels. It was written by St. Luke, the author of the third Gospel, and at the beginning he refers back to his earlier book. "The former treatise (*i.e.* writing) have I made," he says, "of all things that Jesus began both to do and to teach." In his Gospel he had written down the first part of what he had to say, the doings and teachings of Jesus on earth. Now he was about to tell what happened after Jesus had ascended into heaven.

We must not however suppose that he has any intention of putting before us all the acts of all the apostles. None of the Gospel writers made any such attempt as to our Lord Himself. What St. John distinctly says, "Many other signs truly did Jesus which are not written in this book," must be borne in mind for all the Gospels. Those things which are told us about Christ are the things which it was most important for us to know, the things which were the best signs and marks to explain the whole of Christ's life. So is it in the Acts. First, we have nothing but the names of three or four apostles.

The rest of the apostles probably lived courageous and devoted lives, each doing his own work in his own portion of the world and helping forward Christ's kingdom. But it was not necessary for us to know what each did. So many different accounts of different apostles would only have puzzled us, and drawn away our attention from the work which God was bringing to pass through one and all. Nor again was it necessary for us to know all that befel even the chief apostles. Even they were less to be remembered than the counsels of God which were wrought out through them. It was enough for us to learn the great steps through which the kingdom of God advanced and a new Christian order of things grew up in the midst of the old worn-out order of the world.

I reminded you last Sunday that, wherever we are reading in the Bible, in the New Testament as well as in the Old, we are always in the presence of the Jews, and must keep them before our minds in order to see what the Bible means. We saw how our Lord Himself was a Jew, and how the burden of St. John's complaint is His rejection by His own people: "He came unto his own and his own received him not." Our Lord's whole manhood was spent in the Holy Land. He was crucified at Jerusalem as King of the Jews; and, when He ascended up into heaven, the Jews, in spite of all their sins, and this last the blackest of all, were still the people of God, and there was no sign of any change in God's counsels towards them. In a few years this state of things was over: the Holy City was trampled under foot by the

heathen Romans, and God's only peculiar people on earth were the despised and persecuted Christians in all lands. That great crash however does not come within the New Testament. We have prophecies of it, but we have no account of it by any writer of the Bible. Yet the book of the Acts from the first chapter to the last shows us the preparation which God was making for the approaching change. The people of God was not to be scattered and cast out till the Church of God was ready to take its place.

It will help you, I think, to understand better the Acts of the Apostles, if you will observe in it four different parts. Few here probably know it well enough to be able at once to follow exactly what I am saying; and indeed I fear altogether that most of our subject for to-day will be found less easily understood and less interesting than the parts of the Bible which we have examined in former weeks. Still it would be a great loss to pass over the Acts, and if you will read the book over afterwards at home in your own Bibles with a little care, I think you will be able to make out the principal points. As I said just now then, there are four steps in the Acts, and they all mark the advances made by the Church in taking its place as not only the true bearer of Christ's image upon earth, but also the true wearer of the old glories given to Israel before Christ came.

The first part is from the beginning to the middle of the sixth chapter. It is the story of the birth and stablishing of the Church in its first home at Jerusalem in the very midst of the Jews. The second part ends nearly with the twelfth chapter. It is the

story of the spread of the Church from Judea to Antioch by apostles belonging to the number of the Twelve who had been with Christ in His lifetime. The third part reaches to the twentieth verse of the nineteenth chapter. It is the story of St. Paul's travels as a missionary to preach the gospel in distant lands. The fourth part is the story of St. Paul's last journey back to Jerusalem ; the attempt of the Jews to kill him there, as they had killed his Master; his leaving of Jerusalem for ever and journey to Rome, the chief city of the heathen world.

Let us now endeavour shortly to notice a few of the leading events in the story, especially such as help us to understand better the purpose of the whole Bible. The beginning of the whole is our Lord's ascension, which we celebrate in the service of Thursday next. Though He had returned from the grave unconquered and unharmed, He did not mean to live any longer on earth either in the suffering and shame which had gone before His death or in the glory of His Father. The work for the sake of which He had been made man was done. It was time for Him to return to His Father, and leave to His faithful disciples the task of spreading the glad tidings among men. They were still the old glad tidings, the news of the kingdom of heaven. His instructions to the apostles, St. Luke tells us, were of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. But the glad tidings were now clothed in a new and mighty form. To tell of *Him* was the privilege of those who preached them : "Ye shall be witnesses unto *me*" were His words. The witness was to be borne first

in Judea and Jerusalem, but then far and wide, even to the uttermost part of the earth. Above all, they were to look for a new presence from heaven to take the place of that presence of His which they were losing. The Holy Ghost, of whom He had spoken before His death, was to come upon them and clothe them with power from on high. When this charge had been given, the Lord disappeared among the clouds, and the apostles were left alone. Their first care was to complete their number, according to the twelve tribes of Israel, by choosing one to take the place of the wretched traitor Judas. Then they waited in patience for the coming of the Holy Ghost.

On the holy fiftieth day, what we now call Whitsunday, He came with signs of power. They spoke no longer in the one sacred language of the Jews, but in the many languages of the Gentiles. In the old time it had been thought that only those who belonged to the same country could be joined together; but here the new faith of Christ was seen binding together men from all nations. As I told you last year, that day was the birthday of the Church. The kingdom which God now claimed over man was a kingdom of the Spirit, ruling over men's inward hearts, and its great mark was its breaking down every barrier which kept men at variance with each other.

In the next few chapters we have various marks of the outward progress which the Church made, ending with the appointment of deacons to relieve the apostles from some of the increasing work thus laid upon them, and the conversion of many Jews to

the faith of Christ. Then the second division begins with the trial of Stephen, one of these deacons, by the unbelieving Jews, and the shedding of the first Christian blood by his stoning to death. The persecution which followed scattered the infant Church of Jerusalem; and so the efforts made by the enemies of the gospel to destroy it only caused it to be carried into fresh places. At this time the Church gained one convert whose marvellous words and works were soon to surpass those of all the original apostles. St. Paul was a narrow-minded Jew who had taken part in the murder of Stephen, and who delighted to show his zeal for the Jews by vigorous persecution of the Christians. Yet, while he was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, he was checked on a journey by a blinding light from heaven and a voice which said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" and that day was the beginning of a new life for him, and through him for us and all distant nations beside. During all this early part of the Acts St. Peter is the true head of the apostles. By him the Church was built up. Foremost in our Lord's lifetime he was also foremost in these days of trial and persecution, and his love and zeal were no doubt among the chief powers which held the infant Church together. But with the third division of the Acts a new state of things begins. That St. Paul, who had been the fiercest of Jews, was now anxious to bring all nations within the true Divine fold. He could not rest without spreading to distant nations the glad tidings which had melted his own heart. So next follow

his travels in different lands. His usual plan was first to address himself to the Jews, and form out of them the beginnings of a fresh Church; and, only when they rejected him, did he turn to the Gentiles. Wherever he went, he did not roughly attack the old beliefs that he found, but endeavoured to use them as stepping stones to a purer and fuller faith, carrying out his Master's principle of not destroying but fulfilling. After various journeys to and fro among lesser places he resolved to go back to Jerusalem and thence on to Rome. He felt it to be a dangerous visit, and he was warned by the way not to persevere: but his decision was made, and once more he cast in his lot with his own dearly loved people. But they valued the knowledge of God and of the kingdom of God only as a pride and privilege to themselves: they felt nothing but indignation at other men being made to share their blessings, and so they bitterly hated the man who was filling the earth with the name of Christ. Christ Himself had been accused of insulting the holy temple; Stephen had been put to death for the same reason, and for his refusal to believe that God's favour was to be tied for ever to a stiffnecked and rebellious people; and now it was the turn for the persecutor of Stephen to have a plot formed against his life on the same accusation. He found protection against his own countrymen in the justice of the heathen Romans; and after a long delay was taken to Rome to plead his cause, being shipwrecked by the way, and showing then how one, whose heart was filled with the loftiest thoughts of the advancement of God's kingdom, was still the

calmest and wisest in the hour of outward danger. At Rome the Jews finally cast him off, and so by no act of his own he found himself and the Church of Christ thrown upon the wide world, no longer permitted to worship God at Jerusalem, but finding His presence everywhere.

These are the main outlines of the story of the Acts. But there is one feature which appears again and again, to which I desire to call your attention on this the last Sunday after Easter. The resurrection of Christ, which is the end of the gospel, is the foundation of the whole faith of the apostles. To be witnesses of His resurrection, to declare that they had once more had among them Him who had been laid in the grave, was their first and most necessary work. That experience had changed for themselves the whole appearance of life: by making it known to others they believed that they could change the whole face of the world. And it was a well-founded belief. Though all the great ones of the earth were gathered together against God's Holy Child Jesus, they knew that the Lord of hosts was on His side and on their side. Out of that wretched decaying old world a new world was fashioned by the power of faith in Christ dying and rising from the dead.

And, if we ask how that wonder-working faith was kept alive, again the Acts of the Apostles give us the answer. They point to the Holy Ghost, and the work of the Holy Ghost, in building up a Holy Catholic Church. The apostles were able to believe in an ever present, ever living Christ, the true image of the everlasting God, because they believed

in a Spirit of truth and love who dwelt in their own hearts and taught them to cleave to one another as members of the same body. "The multitude of them that believed," says St. Luke, "were of one heart and of one soul." Thus in His Church God set before us one more image of Himself and His kingdom. He taught us to find in charity and peace and mutual help the true entrance into His own life, which is also the life of heaven.

XXIII

THE BIBLE. (XI.) THE EPISTLES

"THESE things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."—1 *Timothy* iii. 14, 15.

THE Word of God through the apostles,—that is the subject which occupied us last Sunday, and which will occupy us to-day and for one Sunday more. We heard long ago how in the New Testament God speaks to us through His Son. He speaks to us through His Son in all parts of the New Testament from the first word to the last. In the first four books, which are called the four Gospels, Jesus Christ is set before us Himself simply and clearly. That is *the* gospel, the good news of God and God's kingdom brought near to man. The Son of God stands there before our eyes working and speaking, suffering, dying, and raised from the dead by His Father's might. His own words, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," show how the Gospels may be to us as a window through which we may look into

heaven. The other books of the New Testament also speak to us from God through His Son, but in a different way. As in the Gospels we see Christ, so in the books of the apostles we learn to understand the meaning of what we have seen. We ought to be always carrying our eyes back to the original picture: no explanations can take the place of that. But it is a great help to us to know what those men thought and felt who had lived in daily converse with the Divine Master, and what sort of things they did on the strength of their belief.

Last Sunday we had before us the book of the Acts of the Apostles. There the story of our Lord is followed up by the story of the faithful followers whom He chose to carry on His work after He had ascended into heaven. As in the Gospels we have only chosen words and works of our Lord, viz., those best adapted to give us a true notion of Himself and of God's kingdom; so here we have only chosen words and works of the apostles, viz., those which best show us how their knowledge of Christ enabled them to begin to conquer the world.

But we saw also that the book of the Acts is very much more than a collection of the doings of single men. These men were at once the rulers and the servants of the Church, and the story which we here read is, above all things, the story of the beginnings of the Church. When Christ went away, He did not leave any one man to take His place; but He left a body of men, a brotherhood of men, to take His place, and that body or

brotherhood we call the Church, the outward mark and framework of the unseen kingdom of God. Therefore the book of the Acts begins with that great event which some of us met here last Thursday to celebrate, the mounting up of our Lord Himself into heaven, *i.e.* the end of His earthly life, the outward sign of His return to the Father. And the second chapter begins with the event which we shall celebrate next Sunday—the pouring forth of the Holy Ghost from heaven upon the little flock of Christians, breaking down the barriers which kept them strangers to each other, making them of one heart and of one mind; in a word, declaring them to be the Church of the living God.

Thus the Church was born. We saw further in the different parts of the Acts the steps by which it grew into independence. At each step Jew and Gentile stood before our eyes in rapidly changing positions. In the first part, up to the middle of the sixth chapter, we had the early stablishing of the Church, with different tasks for different members, but one common purpose, in the midst of God's old people at Jerusalem. Then came the death of Stephen and the persecution which followed, scattering the leaders of the Church to other places, and causing it to be planted in a new home, Antioch. Then comes a great change. One of the fiercest persecutors of Christians, a young man who looked on with cruel joy at the murder of Stephen, was himself changed in heart, and led to take his place among the suffering few instead of

the tyrannical many. This young man, whom we now call St. Paul, felt himself called upon to travel about the world preaching the good news which had come so wonderfully home to himself. Wherever he went, he began by preaching to the Jews, but if they refused to hear, he turned to the Gentiles; and so the Church began to draw to itself members out of different lands and peoples. These missionary journeys of St. Paul fill the third part of the Acts, from the thirteenth to the middle of the nineteenth chapter. The fourth and last part of the Acts carries us on a step further. St. Paul goes up once more to Jerusalem to his own people, dear to him in spite of all their sins; but is rejected by them just because they grudged the knowledge of God to other people, and therefore hated the man who was spending his life in spreading it. He escapes death only by appealing to the justice of the heathen Romans, and his appeal carries him away for ever from Jerusalem to Rome, the great city of the heathen world. Thus, at the end of the book, the Church of God, in the person of its foremost apostle, is cut loose from the ancient people of God. It has no longer one single home: its home is throughout the world: and we too, strangers though we be, may claim the God of Israel as our own.

Another important lesson is taught us by this book, and indeed by all the later books of the New Testament. Every reader of the Bible, who thinks about what he reads, must often be struck with one great difference between those old times and what

he sees around him now. In the Bible God appears as mixed up with the affairs of men, acting among men, speaking among men, in a way of which we have no present experience. We hear the wind and the thunder, and the songs of birds, and the voices of each other. We see the sky and the earth and all the living things that grow or move upon the earth, our brother men and all their works and ways. But God Himself is hidden behind a veil. When the heart is blind to His presence, neither the eye nor the ear can avail to make Him known. Yet, as I said before, God was brought nearer to man in Christ than He had ever been before; and it would be a strange result indeed of His coming if we were henceforth to be farther off from God. But no. From the day that the Son of God appeared among us as the Son of Man, the presence of God has been making itself known most of all in the heart and mind of man. He who refused to astonish the crowd into belief by a sign from heaven, was in effect teaching that our inward spirits can take truer hold of God than our outward senses. "The kingdom of God," He said, "is within you." The Holy Spirit, whom He promised to send in His own place, is not a voice outside our ears, but a power from above, strengthening and enlightening our own powers. And this we see most clearly in the books of the apostles. When they had need to know what to believe or what to do, no trumpet spoke to them out of heaven, but they prayed for the help and guidance of the Holy Ghost. They used at the same time

their best endeavours to find out what was right and true, and in the endeavour they found what they sought. The counsels and the doctrines which they thus discovered for themselves, with the help of the Holy Spirit within them, are written down for our benefit. We find there the truths of the Gospel used and applied to the common purposes of life, and endless instruction supplied by this means to ourselves. But we find also an example set us of the way in which we too may find God within us, and open our hearts to His enlightening Spirit.

We come now to the second division of those books of the New Testament which deal with the apostles, and with Christ only through the apostles. The name given to this part of the New Testament is the Epistles, *i.e.* the letters. They are not letters about trifling and indifferent matters. If they had been, they would not have been kept as part of the Bible. But it needs no pains to discover that, for instance, the Epistle to Philemon is exactly what we mean by a letter; and even the longest Epistles may be seen to be real letters, if we read them carefully. Three of them are addressed to private persons; three more to men who were entrusted with the government of churches; and the rest either to the whole church in some one place, or to different churches scattered about the world. The churches were many, the apostles were few: yet when they were absent, their advice and guidance under difficult circumstances were sometimes asked by letter; and then they freely wrote back their mind. Sometimes the news which they heard of what was going on

at a distance stirred them up to write and send messages of warning and encouragement. And again sometimes the dangers which assailed the Church were so widely spread that no single congregation or set of congregations required counsel more than the rest, and then they sent a circular letter to be passed on from church to church.

Much of what I said to you about the words of the prophets in the Old Testament is equally true of the letters of the Apostles. They were written by men who had a keen and lively fellow-feeling with the brethren to whom they were writing, men who believed themselves to be engaged in the same struggle of life or death, and whose sole desire was to make others partakers in the gifts which they knew God to have bestowed on themselves. What they wrote was not a set of general preachings which did not refer to any one state of things in particular: it was always suggested by what was at that moment of most pressing interest for those to whom it was written. At the same time they never wrote mere orders, "Do this," or "Avoid that": they always spoke to the reason and conscience by means of great and wide truths which are true at all times and under all circumstances. Lastly, on the one hand they spoke in the name of God and His Son Jesus: they strove first to kindle or keep alive the love and fear of Him as the foundation of all true knowledge and all right doing. On the other hand they taught that the proof of true godliness lies in the simple duties of life, and that they are the best Christians who are the best husbands and wives, and best parents and

children, and best masters and servants. But in joining together the service of God and the service of men they had one new doctrine to insist on, of which the prophets had only a faint dream. They could say boldly, "We are every one members one of another," and on that ground call on every man to study the good of his neighbour. They could do this because Christ had set the example, and because the very existence of the Church of Christ was without meaning, if this were supposed to be a thing with which religion had no concern.

Of the twenty-one Epistles preserved in the New Testament fourteen proceed from St. Paul, while the other seven, which are called Catholic or General Epistles, bear the names of four other apostles. In St. Paul's writings one word stands out above all others, 'faith.' He fought all his battles in that name. He saw around him dangers of various kinds assailing the Church, all because faith was put aside, and so he was never tired of showing his readers that the want of faith, of trust in the Lord God, who had been revealed in Jesus Christ dying and rising from the dead, was the most deadly of all wants. His words have often been misunderstood and used in ways which he would have wholly disapproved. But they will stand fast to the end of time, warning mankind against trusting to the notion that they can buy God's favour by outward works and against crouching before God as a hard Master, instead of trustfully leaning upon Him as one whose delight is to save and to deliver from death.

I can but shortly notice the chief subjects of

St. Paul's different Epistles. In the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, which were the earliest written of all, he chiefly teaches his readers in what spirit to look for the coming of the Lord, calmly and soberly doing their appointed work. In the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians we see him upholding the freedom of the Gospel against those Jewish Christians who wished to bind men for ever with the fetters of the old law. The Epistle to the Romans is at the same time the fullest declaration of doctrine about the purposes of God which we find anywhere in St. Paul's writings. The First Epistle to the Corinthians deals with a number of questions which were disturbing the Church, and points out how far a spirit of charity, of seeking the general good, would go towards showing a way out of difficulties. In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians more than any other Epistle we have a picture of St. Paul himself, affectionately pleading with his converts, and drawing out their attachment to him by the depth and power of his own feelings. In Philippians we have glad-hearted encouragements to converts for whom he could only wish that they might go on more and more as they had begun. The Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians were written later, when St. Paul was a prisoner at Rome. In them he rises to loftier and more wonderful heights than before, as he looks upon the plans of God for the whole world fulfilled in Christ, the head of men and the head of the world, the middle point in which earth and heaven meet, the life of the Church which is His body. Yet later still are what

are called the Pastoral Epistles, the three to Timothy and Titus, in which he teaches the true duties of the bishop and ruler of a church. Then comes the short letter to his friend Philemon about the runaway slave Onesimus. Lastly, we have the Epistle to the Hebrews, not actually written by St. Paul himself, but the work of some disciple of his who was filled with his spirit. It is addressed to Christians who were tempted by persecution to give up their faith. Its great subject is the manner in which the Old Testament prepares for the New, and then makes way for it, pointing out how Christ Himself is the truth of which all earlier forms of religion had only been the shadow. It shows how faith had been the one power which made the weak strong in every age, and how much greater might it should have now for those who believe in the Son of God.

When we pass from St. Paul to St. James, the change is great. It is a striking lesson to us to see how different language both use, because they looked at truth from different sides, and yet how both alike had their work to do for the Church, and served it far more effectually than if one had been the mere copy of the other. Nothing so rebukes our little narrow ways of judging men, and our inclination to cavil at all who do not run in our own groove, as this Divine breadth of the New Testament and of the Church of the New Testament. St. James, the brother of our Lord according to the flesh, and bishop of Jerusalem, lived and died a Jew almost as much as a Christian. He does not dwell on our Lord's acts or His death or His resurrection; but he cherished

deeply such *words* of our Lord as are preserved in our first three Gospels, and his whole Epistle might be called a sermon on the text, "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

In St. Peter we have a link between St. Paul and St. James. He is unlike both: yet he echoes the truth of both. The spirit of the whole gospel is in him. He is ever dwelling on the sufferings of Christ on the one side, and the glory of Christ on the other. The second Epistle which bears his name may be taken along with the Epistle of St. Jude. In both there is a strong warning against false teachers of a peculiarly dangerous kind, who, under the pretence of religion, brought in corrupt morals and debased, instead of raising, the characters of those who listened to them.

St. John's second and third Epistles are short and affectionate greetings and encouragements to two personal friends. His longer Epistle is a most solemn warning from the disciple whom Jesus loved against indifference about sin, against making believe to love God while we hate our brother men, and against letting go our faith in the Son of God's coming in the flesh. The warning to his flock is almost lost in the fulness of the aged apostle's own faith and love. He begins with eternal life, he ends with eternal life; he had found eternal life through his knowledge of Jesus Christ. If we would understand the work of the apostles under the guidance of the Spirit in taking of the

things of Christ, and showing them to us, we cannot do better than begin with listening to his own account of the matter. "The life," he says, "was manifested (or shown to men), and we have seen it, and bear witness and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested (or shown) unto *us*; that which *we* have seen and heard declare we unto *you*, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you that your joy may be full."

XXIV

THE BIBLE. (XII.) THE APOCALYPSE

"I JESUS have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.—*Revelation* xxii. 16.

WE come to-day to the last book of the New Testament and of the Bible, the Revelation of St. John. It is on the whole the most difficult book in the Bible; and this probably is the reason why so little of it is appointed to be read in church, the epistle for to-day being one of the most striking of the passages which we are thus accustomed to hear. There is good reason to hope that before long its chapters will take their place in our service as second lessons like the chapters of every other book of the New Testament. But meanwhile every one can read it for himself in his own Bible; and the more he reads it, the better will it be for him if he reads it with an open heart and a desire to find in it light from above to lighten the darkness of his own life.

No one who reads in that spirit will find the book

of Revelation unprofitable reading merely because there are hundreds of things there which he does not understand, and can never hope to understand. The power with which it lays bare the world above, and the world beneath, and in a measure the world to come, is not lost for us by any mere want of understanding. Those words near the end of the book, "Let him that is athirst come" may be applied to our treatment of the book. Those who are athirst for the water of life will find the water of life springing bright and clear and plentiful there. Those who have no thirst for the water of life, and only care to amuse themselves with the sound of the words, had better leave the book alone.

The book of Revelation is not only difficult, but difficult for every one. Some of you may have come across books written in the present day which profess to explain it all. I cannot say that I think the explanations are generally worth much; nay, they are, as a rule, not even on the right track, so that there is very little to be learnt from them. But neither do I feel competent to give you in their place anything more than a few hints which may enable you to approach the book in a right spirit. We have hitherto been looking at the books of the Bible chiefly as parts of one great book. That is also the safest way of approaching the Revelation of St. John. We have found the pith of the whole Bible to be God making Himself known to man; and assuredly we shall find the same character in this the last utterance of His written word.

First let us consider the place which the Revelation of St. John holds in the New Testament. You will remember that what marks out the New Testament from the Old is that in it God speaks through His Son. You will remember also that in the first four books of the New Testament—the Gospels—we have the simple, naked message of God conveyed to us by a four-fold picture of the Son Himself, His birth, His life with its ministry of word and deed, His sufferings and death, and His glorious resurrection. *There* nothing comes between us and Him; we are not troubled with doctrines or preachings about Him; we are simply bidden to look on Christ and learn of Him, and believe that in so doing we are learning what it most concerns us to know about the Lord Almighty, since He Himself has said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." You will remember that in the three other groups of books God is still teaching us through His blessed Son, but not through His Son alone; rather through the impression which His Son made upon His faithful followers in that first age. You will remember that Christ's ascension into heaven was followed by His sending of the Holy Ghost, and that the coming of the Holy Ghost was also the foundation of the Church, the body of Christ, the outward and visible bearer of His presence on earth. You will remember that in the Acts of the Apostles we had a picture of the steps by which the Church grew in numbers and width and independence, receiving freely into itself men of all nations, and showing by its acts

and the acts of the apostles who ruled it the true life of men who believe in a crucified and risen Son of God. Lastly, you will remember that in the Epistles we found the express teaching given by the apostles sometimes to the whole Church universal, sometimes to the churches of single places, sometimes to the rulers of churches; sometimes to private Christians. This was the teaching which they gave by letter when they were consulted about difficult matters of doctrine or practice, or when they saw for themselves that warnings or encouragements or instructions were greatly needed. Still we found the same character in a new form. The teaching of the Church of Christ by the apostles of Christ, who were filled with the spirit of Christ, is one of the instruments by which God helps us to understand what Christ was and is, and to apply that understanding to our own use.

We now come to a third way in which the Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us through the apostles and through the Church; and that is by way of prophecy. We do not hear so much of prophecy in the New Testament as in the Old, but still we do hear of it now and then. Last Sunday we heard how, among the gifts which Christ in that age gave his Church were prophets as well as apostles and evangelists; and there are many signs that the power of prophecy wrought mightily in the daily life of that generation. But we have only one *book* of prophecy, and that is a peculiar one. It contains within itself epistles or letters to seven churches: so far it shows its con-

nexion with the new time, and reminds us that it was meant to serve just as practical purposes as the letters of St. Paul or the other apostles. But the rest of it is made up almost wholly of visions. The teaching is clothed in bodily forms ; its motto is "Come and *see*." In this respect the prophecies of the Old Testament of which it chiefly reminds us are those of Daniel, and then in a less degree of Zechariah and Ezekiel. It is not merely a prophecy, but it belongs to the most prophetic of all kinds of prophecy—it is a revelation, that is, an unveiling. It draws aside the curtains which bound our view in ordinary times. In each direction where our sight is apt to be stopped short a new world is opened before us—the heaven above us, the bottomless pit beneath us, the future end to which all things move. The strife between good and evil, about which we are so miserably indifferent both in our own hearts and in the world around us, is seen to be no light, unimportant matter, since it is part of a mighty warfare in the world of spirits. The lesson of Christ's own life is shown to be repeated in the life of His Church. As He passed through suffering to glory, so must they who bear His name. If the cruel world seems too strong for them now, they are reminded that it seemed too strong for Christ when His soul was poured out on the Cross ; and so His return to life and glory is the pledge of what God has prepared for them who are faithful unto death. Every power of evil is seen to be surely doomed at last, and so we are bidden endure always and hope always, for the end is sure.

And again, if the gospel is the setting forth of the image of Christ, then the gospel is the very foundation of the Revelation of St. John. The very first words are "The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him": the very first vision which opened before the eyes of St. John was of the Son of Man standing in the midst of the seven candlesticks which represent the churches. In the fifth chapter He alone prevails to open the sealed book. In the fourteenth chapter He stands on Mount Sion with the twelve times twelve thousand who have His Father's name on their foreheads. In the nineteenth chapter He rides forth to judge and make war in righteousness as King of kings and Lord of lords. And in the last chapter He declares, "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches."

Once more this testimony of Jesus is conveyed through the Spirit and the Church. The seven different churches of Asia at the beginning together stand for the one universal Church. The fortunes of the Church, its seeming death, its deliverance and final glory are the framework of the whole book. And the life which holds the Church together is no other than the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of prophecy, who fills the heart of St. John himself. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" is the warning voice of the Epistles at the beginning. "The Spirit and the bride, *i.e.* the Church, say Come," is the invitation to drink of the water of life which is heard among the last words.

Thus the Revelation of St. John winds up the

whole New Testament. But it does much more than this: it winds up the whole Bible, and in so doing makes us feel that the Bible is indeed not only many books but also one book, carrying out one purpose and plan from first to last. To begin with, the language is throughout for the most part borrowed from the Old Testament and especially from the books of the prophets. We cannot read a chapter carefully without seeing how St. John's mind was filled with the words spoken by the men of old time, and how he used their lessons along with his own knowledge of Jesus Christ to explain to himself the ways of God in the events which were happening around him. And so it comes to pass that the attentive study of the Old Testament is to us one most useful help towards the understanding of the book of Revelation. If we wish to grasp the meaning of the pictures and images which crowd upon our sight as we read, the first step should be to try whether we cannot trace them back to some form which rose before the eyes of the early prophets of Israel.

But again the book of Revelation keeps us constantly in the presence of the Jews, and compels us to remember that God's covenant with His own original people is the foundation of all His plans of salvation for mankind. The holy Jewish numbers 7 and 12 run through the book and perpetually recall our thoughts to the Sabbath of God and the tribes of the people of God. Nay, the servants of God who are sealed upon their foreheads before the plagues are let loose upon the earth, are sealed by

tribes, twelve thousand to each by name. Nay in the last great vision the names of the same twelve tribes are written on the gates of the new Jerusalem; and the foundations of the wall of the city have in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, the link between the Old time and the New, the friends and followers of the crucified King of the Jews, who became also bearers of the gospel to all peoples and tongues. Nay, when Jesus speaks in His own name in the concluding verses, He calls Himself the root and the offspring of David, delighting to link His name with that of the shepherd king who had first by his righteous government moulded the children of Israel into one people.

Once more the Revelation of St. John goes back to the very beginnings of the Old Testament beyond the limits of the Jews. The paradise or garden of God appears once more, and in the midst of the new Jerusalem the tree of life is seen growing. Christ who describes Himself as the beginning and ending, the first and the last, suffers nothing to perish, but carries on all things to perfection. He does not lead men back simply to their early childhood; He guides them ever onwards, and encourages every stage of their growth to full stature; but He does not cast away the fresh charm of early innocence; He brings it back ripened and ennobled in the Heavenly Father's kingdom.

I have spoken now of the place which the book of Revelation holds in the New Testament, and the place which it holds in the whole Bible. It remains to say a few words on its own character as a single

book and the purpose with which it would seem to have been written. We are told in the ninth verse of the first chapter that John was a companion in tribulation with the seven churches of Asia, and that the visions which he wrote down for their instruction had been seen by him as he was in the isle called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. The meaning of this is that, at a time when the churches were suffering persecution for the name of Christ, he too was suffering the same, and had been banished away from home into a little island in the midst of the sea. Twice in the lifetime of St. John great persecutions are known to have occurred, and either of these may have given rise to his book. On the whole however, I believe that various marks throughout the book point to the first of these two persecutions as the true time.

And a terrible time it was. The greater part of the civilized world was then subject to the emperor or king of Rome, and the emperor of Rome was Nero, a young man who, after a promising beginning, had become such a monster of wickedness as struck men with horror in the midst of an unusually wicked time. It happened that the city of Rome was on fire, and burned for six days. It was commonly believed at the time that Nero had set it on fire for his own amusement. Whether this was true or not, he began to fear danger to himself from the common belief, and therefore turned the fury against the Christians instead of himself by declaring that it was they who had done it. He put forth all his skill to invent cruel ways of punishment. Some of the

wretched Christians were wrapped in the skins of wild beasts, and then bitten to death by dogs. Others were crucified. Others were sewn up in cloths dipped in pitch, tied to stakes, and set on fire. Either in this persecution, or in one which followed a few months later, St. Peter and St. Paul were themselves murdered. The rage of the heathen against the Christians seems to have broken out in many places, and a cruel death was the lot of many who were not ashamed to confess that they believed in Christ. The crimes of Nero, not against the Christians, but against his own people, at last woke up a rebellion, and he died by his own hand. His death happened exactly eighteen hundred years ago within a day or two. Then came a time of great confusion and bloodshed, no less than three emperors being killed within a year and a half. Meanwhile new dangers had arisen for the Christians. The Jews had rebelled against their Roman masters, and a fierce war had sprung up. The Jews hated the Christians as bitterly as when they had striven to murder St. Paul at Jerusalem; the Romans who had then protected him were now turned against his disciples with equal fury. The whole world was combined against the little flock who believed that Jesus was Lord: it seemed as if they must be rooted off the face of the earth.

That, brethren, was the time when the Revelation of St. John was written. If you wish to understand those marvellous visions, try to carry back your minds to those days of anguish and blood, when to do as we are doing to-day, to meet publicly for the

worship of God as Christians, would have been likely to bring upon us torture and death to-morrow, and when every neighbouring land was given up to violence and every kind of wickedness. Then you may a little understand how the burning words came from St. John's heart. But observe what was the tone of his prophecy. He saw no immediate prospect of a better order of things. Nay, each successive chapter seems to carry us deeper into a vision of judgment. Many in that day believed that the monster Nero, who called forth a kind of admiration by the very greatness of his crimes, would before long come back to life and trample upon all his enemies. And there are signs that St. John himself looked for some such fresh outburst of yet more devilish wickedness, the most complete opposite of the holy Jesus. Yet he never wavers in his faith. He believes that all power is given—to whom? to Him whose name is the Lamb, the gentlest and most helpless of creatures, nay, to the Lamb that was slain. The darkness that encompassed the earth only cleared his eyesight to behold the heavenly light. In the miseries and disorders around him he saw the beginnings of Christ's judgment upon a wicked world, and beyond the clouds he had a vision of the holy city of peace. Many a generation has passed away since that day: but the great decision for life or for death remains the same for us as it did for his trembling disciples. Let us be thankful that we are permitted in these quiet times to look with his eyes upon the awful forms which stand around our little life, and to learn from his example what power the faith in

Christ crucified and risen can give to defy every assault of the enemy.

It seems a change from great things to small when we pass from the wondrous visions of St. John to the doings of a single English society, such as that for which I have to speak to you to-day. But all those grand visions will do us no good if they leave us indifferent to the duties which lie before ourselves as English Christians at the present time. We have all work enough to do in striving by God's grace to train our own hearts into the love and fear of His name. But indifference to the spiritual wants of others is a sure mark that the life within ourselves is feeble and cold. It is our blessing here that for several hundreds of years the house of God has stood among us, ever reminding us whose name we bear, and inviting us to worship together in that name. But there are many other places less happy, places where every year more and more people are crowded together with no church to help them forward on the upward road. The Church Building Society is willing to give help to the best of its power to either the building or the improvement of churches in all kinds of places. For instance, it gave a liberal grant to our own church when it was repaired some time ago, and the number of sittings increased: and for this we owe it a debt of gratitude which I hope will swell our offerings to-day. But the main work of the society is in places poorer and more crowded than this; and I do earnestly trust that we shall show our sense of God's goodness to us by the help which we give to His worship where it is sorely needed.

For fifty years the society has been at work, and now the need is greater than ever, for men are born into the world faster than churches can be built. The claim is always strong: it comes with special force this year, which ought to be marked by unusual efforts, so that the society may start afresh on its second half-century with greatly increased powers. Believe me, brethren, we do ourselves grievous injury by coolness and niggardliness when appeals of this kind come round. By giving freely, according as we can spare, for the sake of Christ and His Church, we enlarge our own hearts, we join ourselves in fresh bonds to our brethren, we bring the kingdom of God nearer to us.

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